1   Buddhism as a Method of Self-healing

Appreciating early Buddhism through Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

An essay by Piya Tan ©2008, 2013

Introduction

This essay was initially inspired by Steven C Hayes' article, "Buddhism and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy [ACT]" (2002). Throughout this paper, I have taken "therapist" and "counselor" as synonyms, as is the current trend in psychotherapy. As this paper addresses "Buddhism as a method of self-healing," understandly, I have mostly used the first person plural here. As this paper's vision is that of self-healing, it is best read as if we are the client or counselee ourself.

In the footnotes, references with the initial "R" refers to "Reflections" by Piya Tan, followed by its unique number. For example, "R170" means "Reflection no 170." For a full list of Reflections, see the Dharmafarer website (dharmafarer.org) or Piya TAN 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2013.

1 What is ACT?[1]

1.1 DEFINITION AND HISTORY[2]

1.1.1 Definition. Acceptance and commitment therapy (abbreviated and pronounced as "ACT") is a contextually based cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)[3] that significantly borrows from early Buddhist teachings and practices.[4] The ACT model holds that culturally supported attempts to control and eliminate unpleasant private experiences (such as negative emotions, thoughts, and memories) resulting in personal suffering, behaviour disorders, and a lack of vital and purposeful living [2.2.3.2].

ACT attempts to teach us (the counselee) to accept, rather than control or eliminate, private experiences that are not amenable to immediate change. Acceptance is accomplished through teaching us (the counselee) to see these private experiences as conditioned verbal responses, rather than actual realities. ACT emphasizes that we (the counselee) should *approach*, rather than avoid, valued life goals, even though pursuing such goals may evoke "uncomfortable" private experiences. (Strosahl, 2002:1)

1.1.2 Brief history. The therapeutic approach was originally called "comprehensive distancing" (Zettle, 2005). It was developed in the late 1980s by Steven C Hayes, Kelly G Wilson, and Kirk S Strosahl.[5] ACT, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, Functional Analytic Psychotherapy, Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy and other acceptance- and mindfulness-based approaches are commonly accepted as contributing to "the Third Wave of Behaviour Therapy,"[6] much of which is deeply influenced by Buddhist psychology.[7]

The first wave started in the 1920s in connection with Pavlov's classical (respondent) and Skinner's operant conditioning related to reinforcing consequences. The second wave arose in the 1970s and included cognition in the form of irrational beliefs, dysfunctional attitudes or depressogenic attributions (Leahy, 2004).

In the late 1980s, empirical limitations and philosophical misgivings of the second wave gave rise to Steven Hayes' ACT theory, which modified the focus of abnormal behaviour away from the content or form towards the *context* in which it occurs (Leahy, 2004). ACT research has suggested that many of the

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[1] See Strosahl, 2002.

[2] See Hersen & Sledge, *Encyclopedia of Psychotherapy,* 2002:1-8.

[3] See eg Baer, 2003:128. On similarities and differences of ACT and CBT, see Herbert & Forman, 2011, esp 233-263. On differences between ACT and CBT, see Hayes & Pierson, 2004:3.

[4] On Buddhist influences on CBT, see Herbert & Forman, 2011:326 f. On Buddhist influences on ACT, see special Buddhism issue of *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice* 9,1, esp Hayes, 2002.

[5] Murdock, 2009 & "Getting in on the Act," The Irish Times, Tue, 7 Jun 2011.

[6] Martell, Addis & Jacobson, 2001:197; Öst, 2008.

[7] Hayes, 2002; Hayes & Smith, 2005; Nauriyal et al, 2006 esp Bayes et al, 433-447; Ciarrochi, 452-464, 467; Bowen et al, 405.

emotional defences we use with conviction to solve problems or disorders, actually entangle us with more suffering (Hayes & Smith 2005).[8]

1.1.3 ACT in Buddhist light. Like many theories, systems, and methods in western psychology, "Acceptance and Commitment Therapy," as we can see, speaks a remarkably Buddhist language, both in theory and practice, especially in the mindfulness aspect. Hence, it is sometimes generically spoken of as being "mindfulness-based."[9] It is now common knowledge that Buddhism has become like a gold mine from which the psychological miners mine and craft the Buddhist gold ore into remarkably useful and precious tools.

This is not so much of a comparative study of ACT and Buddhism as it is a reflection on ACT as a tool for a better understanding of Buddhist psychology, especially by way of self-help through counseling and meditation. Hopefully, such an enterprise would be mutually beneficial to those interested in modern psychology and Buddhism, and those seeking personal development or healing.

We will first focus on discovering what ACT is, that is, its key terms and concepts [2]. Then we will briefly examine the ACT therapeutic process [3].

The spiritual context here is mainly that of early Buddhism, which follows. However, due to space constraint, we will limit our discussion mainly to the universality of human suffering [4], the role of craving [5], mindfulness and its benefits [6], the nature of valued action [7], and the issues of self [8]. These are, in fact, also the most basic ideas of ACT.

2 The key ACT concepts and terms

2.1 RELATIONAL FRAME THEORY (RFT)

2.1.1 A human language problem. ACT psychopathology and therapy is based on **relational frame theory (RFT),** a comprehensive contextual theory of behavioural processes underlying language and cognition.[10] It is a post-Skinnerian[11] account of the structural and functional[12] properties of human language and thought that is based in contextual behaviourism. RFT views language and thought as relational behaviour that is controlled by learning factors.[13]

According to Hayes, the essence of RFT is that "humans learn to relate events mutually and in combination, that this relational response is brought under the control of arbitrary contextual cues, and that the stimulus functions of events are modified by the functions of other events related to them" (2002:59). Such a relational learning behaviour—deriving meaning by relating words and events, words and words, events and events by thinking, listening and speaking—is found only in humans, not in non-humans. We are conditioned with such conceptions by adults since our infancy.[14]

2.1.2 Childhod conditioning. Say, a child is told, "A is the opposite of B, and B is the opposite of C," where A refers to "money," B is "poverty," and C is "success." A can be used to buy or get things; which do you want: B or C? This relation (specified arbitrarily) is both <u>mutual</u> (if A is the opposite of B, then B is the opposite of A), and <u>combinative</u> (A must be the same as C, since here an opposite of an opposite is the same thing).

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[8] For a broader context of ACT, see Roeckelein, *Elsevier's Dictionary of Psychological Theories* (2006): sv Behavior Therapy and Cognitive Therapy, Theories of.

[9] See Fruzzetti & Erikson 2010.

[10] Hayes, Barnes-Holmes & Roche 2001. Hayes, Shenk, Masuda & Bunting 2006:434-436.

[11] B F Skinner (1904-1990) was the founder of "radical behaviourism," a school of psychology that sees human behaviour as deterministic, needing to be conditioned to do or be good, and relies on an "experimental analysis of behaviour" rather than on psychological theories.

[12] The terms "structural"and "functional" are well known in British sociology, where they generally mean, respectively, (1) the form and system (say, of society or, in psychology, of an individual), and (2) the influence or effect of such a structure. Here, the terms specifically refer to the structure and form of <u>language</u>, and its effect on the individual.

[13] Strosahl 2002:1.

[14] Lipkens, Hayes & Hayes 1993.

Further, the child would probably choose C over B, based on the specified functions of A (ie, buying things) and the relation of B and C to A (since C is seen to be the same as A, we could surely use C to get things; but with B, being the opposite of A, we cannot).[15]

2.1.3 Problems of language. While language is clearly necessary and helpful in human communcation,

> Language enables us to constantly evaluate ourselves to compare ourselves to an unrealistic ideal, to bring our painful past into the present, and to project fearsome futures. Given its ubiquitous nature, language penetrates almost all life contexts. Its dark side can cause suffering unique to human beings.   (Bowen et al, 2006:433 f)

Where does such language come from? How we relate to our sense-experiences gives us the language and words to perceive and communicate our experiences. Unfortunately, they also greatly increase our contact[16] with painful events. When we recount a painful event, some of the negative qualities of the original event may continue in the telling.[17]

Even very positive environments can lead to pain through relational means, such as when a great success reminds us of past failures. Unable to avoid pain simply by avoiding external circumstances, we try to avoid negative private experiences directly, a process ACT terms as "experiential avoidance" [1.2.2.3]. For example, we "try to forget about" past traumas, or try not to feel anxious in situations that lead to anxiety. All such processes substantially increase our capacity for suffering. (Hayes, 2002:59)[18]

2.2 FEAR

2.2.0 Key concepts. The acronym FEAR expresses 4 of the key concepts in an ACT approach to psychopathology, that is, F̲usion, E̲valuation, A̲voidance, and R̲easoning, or more fully, cognitive fusion, verbal evaluation, experiential avoidance and reason-giving.[19] A familiarity with these key ACT ideas helps us better in understanding their psychological connections with Buddhist teachings, especially in terms of self-healing.[20]

2.2.1 Cognitive fusion

2.2.1.1 Cognitive fusion refers to the domination of *derived* functions over *direct* ones. As behaviour becomes more verbally regulated, it also tends to be less reflective of direct or real experience. In other words, we perceive private experiences, such as emotions, thoughts and feelings from the perspective structured by a "private event" itself as a *fixed* mental state, rather than the perspective of an observer of that event as a *process*. We then begin to "live inside our heads" or create our own perpetual world of suffering.

The ACT term "cognitive fusion" closely parallels the Buddhist term, "conceptualization" (*maññana*), the verb of which is "to conceptualize" (*maññati*) [4.2.3.5]. However, in Buddhist psychology, there is a host of other verbs that describe this "fusing" activity of the mind, such as "I-making" (*ahaṁ,kāra*),[21]

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[15] See Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes & Cullinan 2001:183. For a review of basic literature on such performances, see Hayes, Barnes-Holmes & Roche 2001.

[16] "Contact" is a common ACT term, which has, I presume, the same meaning as its Buddhist namesake, *phassa* in Pali, which refers to any "sense-stimulus." On sense-experiences, see **Sabba S** (S 4.23), SD 7.1. As proximate condition for feeling, perception, and volitional formations, see **Hāliddakāni S 1** (S 22.3), SD 10.12; N**agara S** (S 12.65), SD 14.2; **Naḷa,kalāpiya S** (S 12.67), SD 83.11.

[17] On the nature and problem of language, see "More than words can say" (R163), 2010, & "Words are drugs" (R170) 2011.

[18] See also Hayes & Smith 2005:17-32 & Törneke 2010.

[19] Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson 1999.

[20] On this section, see Hayes 2002:59 f.

[21] See **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1.

"mine-making" (*mamaṁ,kāra*)[22] and reification (*tam,mayatā*).[23] On a simpler level, this is a kind of emotional reactivity.[24]

2.2.1.2 Closely related to cognitive fusion is the notion of **literality**. This is the capacity of representational thought and language to take on literal meaning, and for the derived stimulus functions of referents to dominate over other sources of behaviour. An example is "anticipatory panic attacks," which result from simply imagining being in a panic-associated situation, such as a mall or an elevator, and then taking those thoughts literally.[25]

2.2.1.3 Reducing fusion or "defusion" is a key target of meditation, mindfulness, and deliteralization interventions in ACT[26] [4.2.1.3]. Indeed, in Buddhist meditation and mindfulness training, we train ourself to cut down thinking (*vitakketi*) or conceptualizing (*maññati*)—in other words, to cut down, even abandon, the use of language and concepts—so that we can shut down (as it were) the 5 physical senses—so that we can deal directly with our mind.

2.2.1.4 An alternative method (especially helpful if we are overwhelmed by thinking) is to apply wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) to the process itself or use the perception of impermanence (*anicca,-saññā*). Wise attention refers to habitually and mindfully regarding a thing or an event for what it really is (say, a thought or a sound),or seeing it as fluctuating (rise-and-fall) event. This is the famous "Bāhiya teaching," as recorded in **the (Arahatta) Bāhiya Sutta** (U 1.10) and **the Māluṅkya,putta Sutta** (S 35.-95), thus:

Here,[27] in things[28] that are to be seen, heard, sensed[29] and cognized [known] by you:[30]
in the seen	there will only be the seen;
in the heard	there will only be the heard;
in the sensed	there will only be the sensed;
in the cognized	there will only be the cognized. (U 1.10), SD 33.7 = (S 35.95,12), SD 5.9

2.2.1.5 The perception of impermanence is a simple mindfulness practice that we are advised to do constantly. Its benefit, when regularly and habitually done, is the attainment of streamwinning, the first stage in the path to full awakening, in this life itself.[31] The simplicity of this practice facilitates us, even as a beginner or a counselee, to do it as part of our therapy or as a personal practice.[32]

2.2.2 Verbal evaluation

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[22] See **Mine: The nature of craving,** SD 19.3.

[23] See *Atammayatā,* SD 19.13.

[24] See *Anusaya,* SD 31.3 (3.2).

[25] Cf the Buddhist idea of "world," as stated in **(Lujjati) Loka S** (S 35.82), SD 7.3.

[26] Strosahl 2002:1.

[27] The vocatives ("Bāhiya" and "Māluṅkya,putta") have been omitted.

[28] "Regarding things seen, heard, sensed and cognized," *diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññatabbesu dhammesu,* lit "in things that are to be seen, to be heard, to be sensed, to be cognized." See foll n.

[29] *Muta*, ie, what is tasted, smelt and touched. See prev n.

[30] This verse is the crux of the sutta and *satipaṭṭhāna*. In sutta terms, such experiences are not to be seen as "This is mine" (*etam mama*) (which arises through craving, *taṇhā*), or as "This I am" (*eso'ham asmi*) (due to conceit, *māna*), or as "This is my self" (*eso me attā*) (due to wrong view, *diṭṭhi*) (**Anattā Lakkhaṇa S**, S 3:68), SD 1.2. In short, such experiences are not "beliefs" but direct experiences of reality. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door. As long as the experience of sensing is mindfully left at its sense-door and taken for what it really is, that is an experience of reality (*param'attha*); after it has reached the mind-door and evaluated, it becomes conventional (*paññatti*) reality, that brings one suffering due to greed, hate or delusion. When such sense-experiences are mindfully left on the reality level, one would in due course see the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. See Mahasi Sayadaw, *A Discourse on Malukyaputta Sutta,* tr U Htin Fatt, Rangoon, 1981.

[31] See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7; **Entering the stream,** SD 3.3.

[32] If neither method works, say because it actually makes us (the counselee) recall the painful episodes, then the counselor should teach us a simple guided breath meditation [6.3.1.4].

2.2.2.1 Verbal comparative relations are useful where they allow us to examine or evaluate concept-ualized consequences, and thus facilitate problem-solving and planning. This same process, however, also opens us to experiences that are feared or wished for, thus greatly amplifying our capacity for suffering. Verbal evaluation then worsens the problem arising from cognitive fusion [2.2.1].

For example, a very successful person believes himself to be a "failure" because his enterprise does not produce what he had hoped for. Such a person might imagine idealistic results, but will be dissatisfied even when he achieves considerable success which is less that his imagined ideal. This is mostly because he keeps telling himself that he is a "failure," that he has not achieved his "goal."

2.2.2.2 In Buddhist meditation, the meditator is often instructed to avoid <u>mental chatter</u> or unmindful subverbalizing, because it prevents the mind from settling and focusing. "Mental chatter" is a meditation neologism that covers a range of mental activities, especially thinking and reasoning (*vitakka,vicāra*). The verbs here are "to think" (*vitakketi*) and "to reason or ponder" (*vicāreti*).[33] On the attaining of full focus or samadhi, *vitakka,vicāra* ("thinking and reasoning") are reduced to a subtle mental activity of "initial ap-plication and sustained application," that is, we are fully able to direct the mind to the meditation object and keep it there.[34]

Generally, whether in meditation or outside of it, the suttas instruct us not to be hijacked by such verbal evaluation or mental chatter. A simple way to avoid being overwhelmed or depressed by such sub-verbalization is to regard them simply, that is, objectively, as what they really are: noting them simply as "thinking...thinking," or mentally smiling at them, and letting them go [6.2].

2.2.3 Experiential avoidance

2.2.3.1 Experiential avoidance is the unwillingness to accept a particular private experience (such as bodily feelings, behaviour, emotions, thoughts, and memories) and to endeavour to mollify their form, frequency, or situational sensitivity, even when such a neglect brings about psychological harm.[35] Ironic-ally, the more we try to avoid the negative private events, the more they tend to recur and worsen, so that the suffering is reinforced.

Deliberate (that is, verbally self-guided) attempts to avoid private experiences remind us of the very experiences we want to avoid, deflect us from effectively attending to the current environment, and often tend to evoke the very negative emotions that we are trying to avoid. Take a simple example: if a child fears that a "ghost" might be under his bed, it does not help to say, "There is no *ghost* under your bed!" It is more helpful to say something like, "I will leave the light on, and I'm just next door, if you need me."

2.2.3.2 Merely avoiding the realities of a situation only represses it, so that even when we have for-gotten about it, it still perniciously hinders or harms us. If we have a personal issue, it means that some-thing is not right and needs healing. As the proverb goes: a stitch in time saves nine. Of course, we should not blindly leap at a problem without first knowing what it really is and how best to deal with it.

The Alabbhanīya Ṭhāna Sutta (A 5.48) gives some very practical advice on how to deal with five basic human problems, namely, <u>decay (aging), sickness, death, destruction and failure</u> of our own as well as of others. While an untutored worldling would be troubled by them, a noble disciple (or a wise practi-tioner) would not. Here is the passage on how the wise reflects on the problem of <u>decay</u>:

> And, bhikshus, for a noble disciple, too, what is subject to <u>decay</u> decays [grows old].
> When what is subject to *decay* does decay, he <u>reflects</u> thus:
> "I'm not the only one who, subject to *decay*, decays.
> For as long as there are the coming and going, passing away and rebirth of beings,
> for all these beings what is subject to *decay* decays.
> And when what is subject to *decay* decays,
> if I were to sorrow, *be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament*,
> I would only fall into confusion.

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[33] See *Vitakka,vicāra,* SD 33.4.
[34] See **Dhyana,** SD 8.4.
[35] Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette & Strosahl 1996.

I would have no appetite for food, too.
My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.
I would not be able to get any work done, too.
My enemies would rejoice.
My friends would be saddened.”
So, when what is subject to *decay* decays,
he sorrows not, feels stressed not, mourns not, beats not his breast, laments not, falls not into confusion.
This, bhikshus, is called a noble disciple, not pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow,
like the untutored worldling who only torments himself.
The noble disciple is sorrowless, the dart drawn out, attains nirvana himself. (A 5.48), SD 42.1

This passage then applies mutatis mutandis to the other four human realities, and should be reflected accordingly. The Sutta closes with this verse on a proactive mental attitude:

If he should know, “Not to be attained   is this goal by me, or by any other,”
then, ungrieving, he would bear it thus: “What shall I do now with resolve?”[36]
(A 5.48), SD 42.1

The Sutta here exhorts us to see the human situation as it really is: *it is subject to decay (aging), sickness, death, destruction and failure*. The idea is not to <u>privatize</u> or own any of these conditions [1.1.1; 3.2.2], which would be foolish because everyone else, too—including those we dislike and our enemies—are subject to them. Furthermore, in learning to be habitually and wholesomely happy in this way, we are walking the path to true happiness, to nirvana itself.

2.2.3.3 **The (Catu) Ṭhāna Sutta** (A 4.192) is a discourse on how to know or read a person in 4 ways, that is, (1) through living together, (2) through dealing with one another, (3) through adversities [4.2.2.3], and (4) through mutual discussion—however, all this is only truly possible *after a long time, through attentiveness and by wisdom*. Of special interest here is the Sutta's instruction on how to recognize <u>a wise person</u>, thus:

Here, bhikshus, through discussing with another, one knows thus:
‘From this venerable one's
     approach to a problem [manner of examining a problem],
     defining the problem [formulating of the question], and
     discussion of the question,
this venerable one is wise, this venerable one is not unwise.
What is the reason for this?
This venerable one utters words that are profound, calming, sublime, beyond thinking [inaccessible to thought], subtle, intelligible to the wise. And when this venerable one speaks of the Dharma, he is able to say, teach, proclaim, establish, reveal, analyse, clarify its meaning, briefly or in detail. This venerable one is wise, this venerable one is not unwise. (A 4.192,5), SD 14.12

The wise person here can be either the counselor or we (the counselee), or both in the end. The counselor certainly must have these qualities—*knowing how to begin by examining the problem, then defining it, and finally discussing it*—so that he is able to coach us (the counselee) through the counseling process. In self-counseling, we need these qualities ourself so that we know how to examine our problem, define it and deal with it. This is a most basic structure of counseling and problem-solving.

2.2.3.4 **The Vitakka Saṇṭhāna Sutta** (M 20) is a remarkably instructive discourse on how to clear the mind of hindrances or distractions during meditation. The methods, however, can also be used in helping us to overcome any unwholesome thoughts in our own minds. The Sutta gives <u>5 methods of overcom-</u>

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[36] Lit, “What firm action do I take now?”

ing mental distractions, that is, (1) thought displacement, (2) aversion therapy, (3) avoidance, (4) thought reduction, and (5) will-power.

Method (1), thought displacement, is described in this way:

> Here, bhikshus, while a monk [a meditator] is attending to some sign [mental object],[37] and there arises in him bad unwholesome thoughts connected with desire,[38] hate[39] or delusion,[40]
> then he should turn his attention to *a different sign* connected with the wholesome.
>
> (M 20), SD 1.6

A parable then follows for each of the 5 methods. Here, it is the parable of a carpenter *using a smaller peg or nail to knock out a larger one in a piece of furniture*. This figure is based on the notion that only one thought can actually arise each moment (just as only a single bit or binary digit of computer data is transmitted each time).

If the first method fails, then we should go on to apply **method (2),** aversion therapy. Here, we examine *the disadvantages or dangers of the unwholesome thoughts*, thus: "These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blameworthy, they bring suffering."[41] The parable here is that of *a well-dressed young person with a carcass of a snake, a dog or a human around his neck*, which he, at once, discards with disgust,

If this second method fails, too, we should go on to apply **method (3),** avoidance or non-attention, that is, *simply disregard* the unwholesome thoughts. Here, we have the parable of the looker, "not wishing to see sights around him, *would shut his eyes or look away in another direction*."

Should this method not work, then we should go on to **method (4),** thought reduction, that is, we *should attend to the stilling of the thought-formation* (by progressively identifying the causes)[42] of those bad, unwholesome thoughts.[43] The parable here is that of a walker who, *finding no reason for walking fast slows down, then stands, then sits down, and finally lies down to rest*.

Finally, **method 5,** that of exerting will-power, is described graphically: "*with clenched teeth and the tongue pressing on the palate*,[44] he should subdue, restrain, attack the (bad) mind with the (good) mind."

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[37] *Nimitta*, here meaning any mental sign or object that catches or holds our attention: see *Nimitta* and *anuvyañjana,* SD 19.14; see also **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss**, SD 13.1 (3.1d) & also *Nimitta*, SD 19.7.

[38] For thoughts connected with desire for living beings, the reflection of the 32 parts of the body should be used; when the desire is towards inanimate objects, one should reflect on the ownerlessness or on the impermanence of things.

[39] For thoughts connected with hate for living beings, apply the cultivation of lovingkindness, of compassion, or equanimity, and the ownership of karma (**Āghāta Paṭivinaya S 1**, A 5.161/3:203). Or, one could reflect on the parable of the saw (**Kakacûpama S**, M 21.20/1:129). For hatred towards inanimate things, the analysis of the elements (*dhātu,vavatthāna*) should be applied: see **Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S** (M 28.6-27/1185-191 = SD 6.16), **Mahā Rāhul'ovada S** (M 62.8-17/1:421-426 = SD 3.11) and **Dhātu,vibhaṅga S** (M 140.13-18/3:240-242 = SD 4.17).

[40] For thoughts connected with delusion (*moha,dhātu*), one has to build up the 5 "Dharma supports" (*dhammûpanissaya*): (1) guidance of a teacher (*garu,saṁvāsa*); (2) intent on learning the Dharma (*uddesa*); (3) intent on inquiring into the meaning of doctrines learnt (*uddiṭṭha,paripucchana*); (4) listening to the Dharma at proper times (*kālena dhamma-s,savana*); (5) inquiry into what are and are not the causes (*ṭhānâṭṭhāna,vinicchaya*) (MA 2:89).

[41] This method was used by the Bodhisattva as recorded in **Dvedhā,vitakka S** (M 19.3-5). Reflecting on the unworthiness of the bad thoughts arouses a sense of shame (*hiri*); reflecting on their dangerous consequences arouses the fear of bad karma (*ottappa*) (A 1:51; It 36).

[42] MA explains *saṅkhāra* here as condition, cause or root, and takes the compound to mean "stopping the cause of the thought." The Chinese Āgama version, MĀ 101 = T1.588b26, however, instructs that one "should use intention and volition to gradually decrease the (unwholesome) thoughts" 當以思行斬減其念 This is accomplished by investigating the unwholesome thought thus: "What is the cause? What is the cause of its cause?" and so on. MA explains that such an investigation would loosen the mind from the flow of bad thoughts, eventually ending them. This is perhaps the most important and interesting of all the methods; hence, the title of the Sutta. See Intro (2) above.

[43] **Daddabha J** (J 322) illustrates this method of going to the root or source of the problem.

[44] *Dante'bhidantam-ādhāya jivhāya tāluṁ āhacca*. As in **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36.20/1:242), SD 49.4, **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85.19/2:93), SD 55.2, and **Saṅgārava S** (M 100.17/2:212), but where it forms the initial prac-

Here we have the parable of the wrestlers: "just as a strong man *holding a weaker man by the head or by the shoulders*, would restrain, subdue, attack him," even so, we should subdue the negative mind.[45]

Although the Sutta instructs us to apply these 5 methods progressively as needed, from the Sutta title, it is clear that method (3)—**thought reduction**—is the key one. In other words, we can use just this one method as and when we are inclined or need to. Or, for that matter, we could also use any of the other four methods should we find that it works for us when needed.[46]

2.2.4 Reason-giving

2.2.4.1 Finally, according to the ACT therapeutic process discussed here, reason-giving draws us into futile efforts to understand and explain the outcome as a method of self-control. Often the "good reasons" we give for our problems or experiences only increase experiential avoidance [2.2.3]. Furthermore, these "reasons" only provide us with a language that reinforces our resistance to change, fearing that we would "be wrong."

The more we rationalize, the more difficult it is for us to see our issues for what they really are,[47] and the more likely we are to engage in harmful worrying, reacting to the negative moods.[48] Such rationalizing and self-rumination have very little or no benefit for us, as we helplessly fall into their rut, extending our sufferings.[49]

Most forms of psychopathology apparently involve specific forms of FEAR: cognitive fusion, verbal evaluation, experiential avoidance, or reason-giving [2.2.0]. Specialist observations of problems such as substance abuse, social withdrawal, agoraphobic avoidance, ruminative worrying, obsessive-compulsive behaviours, and so on, clearly reveal components of cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance in many of those who are afflicted with them.[50]

2.2.4.2 In Buddhist psychology, however, the term "reason-giving" (*vicāreti*) is only one of a number of mental activities at the preconscious level. In psychoanalysis, "**preconscious**" refers to "knowledge, emotions, images, etc, that are not momentarily in consciousness but which are easily accessible."[51] In the Buddhist context, "preconscious" refers to that level of private thinking, planning, reasoning and deliberating that is basically known only to ourself, and also constructs, evaluates or filters what we experience or perceive.

This level of mental processes is represented by verbs such as *vitakketi* (he thinks),[52] *maññati* (he conceives), and *vicāreti* (he reasons), and by nouns such as *maññana* (conceptualization) and *mano,pavicāra* (mental investigation).[53] Conceptualizing[54] is closely related to "mental proliferation" (*papañca*),[55] both of which refer to thoughts and ideas arising from the 3 roots of mental conception or mental proliferation, that is, craving (*taṇhā*), view (*diṭṭhi*) and conceit (*māna*).[56]

In short, the troubled mind incessantly talks to itself, biasedly motivated by greed, hate, delusion or fear. As these are the 4 biases (*agati*), such a state is not only unhelpful to solving the problem at hand,

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tice of the Bodhisattva's self-mortification, and as it is the *least* severe, is recommended as the *last* of the 5 methods: cf J Bronkhorst, "Self and meditation in Indian Buddhism," 1998: 12. **Purisa Thāma S** (A 2.1.5/1:50) teaches one not to be content with wholesome mental states and to be unremitting in one's "personal effort" to win the spiritual goal. See Intro (1). For further discussion, see **Sañcetanika S** (A 10.206), SD 3.9 (6.5).

[45] M 20, SD 1.6.

[46] The "bad unwholesome thoughts" referred to here are the mental hindrances: see *Nīvaraṇa,* SD 32.1.

[47] Addis & Jacobson 1996.

[48] Addis & Carpenter 1999.

[49] Borkovec, Hazlett-Stevens & Diaz 1999.

[50] For information of some these areas, see Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette & Strosahl 1996.

[51] A S Reber, *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology,* 1985:565; also Reber et al 2009.

[52] On *vitakka,* see *Vitakka,vicāra,* SD 33.4. On the context of the arising of *vitakka,* see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18.16), SD 6.14. On how when thinking stops, desires do not arise, see **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21,2.2/2:277).

[53] On the 18 investigations, see **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,10/3:239), SD 4.17.

[54] For an interesting n on *maññati* ("he conceives")*,* see M:ÑB 1162:n6.

[55] On *papañca,* see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18) & SD 6.14 (2).

[56] Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f. See *Nīvaraṇa,* SD 32.1 (3.8.2).

but aggravates it. One thought leads to many more, and they proliferate into thought-explosions (*papañca*). If the mind continues so and remains untreated and unhealed, it is likely to sink into a very pathological level.

3 The ACT therapeutic process

3.0 PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY
3.0.1 Background: Hyping the ACT

3.0.1.1 GRAPHIC SIMPLICITY. ACT therapy, as a form of **cognitive behaviour therapy** CBT, is well known for being effective despite its therapeutic process being comparatively briefer than most other methods of counseling.[57] As a result of the problem-focused approach, CBT treatments are typically brief and time-limited in nature. Many CBT treatments lead to significant clinical improvement and symptom reduction, relative to other forms of psychotherapy, in as few as 10-20 sessions.[58]

Graphic simplicity is an ACT virtue. ACT highlights the connection amongst mindfulness, values, and committed action. According to Harris, presenting the entire ACT in a Nutshell Metaphor as an exercise generally takes no more than about 5 minutes[59] (2009:18). A figure, in short, speaks clearer than words.

Figurative language is a defining human quality. We understand that when someone "needs a hand," it means more than a part of our body. We understand that Kafka's "Metamorphosis" (1915) isn't really about a bug.[60] We understand that the Buddha image is not that of a person, but the ideal of self-awakening and happiness that we can each achieve here and now. Poets can even see that impressive buildings and great walls are not merely memes of glory, but remind us of the thousands who gave their lives to build them, and which are yet themselves impermanent.[61]

3.0.1.2 METAPHORS **and figurative language** are common in ACT,[62] especially when working with acceptance, defusion, and touching the moment. The need for "acceptance," for example, is often referred to as "dropping the struggle," "sitting with the feeling," "letting it be," "making room for it," or "willingness to have it." To stress the urgency of "defusion," we often speak of "letting go," "stepping back," "distancing," "separating," "disentangling," or "dropping the story." Such a language helps us (the counselee) to see what needs to be done more clearly so that we are motivated to "ACT."[63]

Both ACT and Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (DBT) use metaphor and paradox as ways to assist us (the counselee) in either achieving "wise-mind" goals[64] or to work on higher personal values.[65] The use of metaphor and paradox is new as a psychological technique, but they have been used by Buddhists everywhere since the Buddha's own times.[66]

However, the therapeutic benefit and known behavioral processes underlying the use of metaphor and paradox have been demonstrated only recently.[67] In DBT and ACT, metaphor and paradox are means to

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[57] See eg Zettle & Hayes 2002.

[58] Holly Hazlett-Stevens & Michelle G Craske, "Brief cognitive-behavioral therapy: Definition and scientific foundation," in Bond & Dryden 2002:3.

[59] Greg Horgan, "The Nutshell Metaphor," video, 2012. R Harris, "Act in a nutshell: Objections & responses" (PDF): Download. On metaphors in cognitive behaviour therapy, see Hackman et al 2011.

[60] Orig in German, *Die Verwandlung.* See SD 26.9 (1.6.3.4). For a modern trs, see http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5200/5200-h/5200-h.htm & http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/stories/kafka-E.htm.

[61] See eg Shelley's *Ozymandias,* poem & comy: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/guide/238972#poem.

[62] On ACT use of metaphors, see McCurry & Hayes 1992; Monestes & Villatte 2008; Sapolsky 2010; Stewart & Barnes-Holmes 2001. For resources, see http://www.get.gg/metaphors.htm & Ehrnstrom, "Mastering the Metaphor," PowerPoint notes, 2011.

[63] See Hayes, Shenk, Masuda & Bunting 2006:447; also Harris 2009. On metaphors in cognitive behaviour therapy, see Hackman et al 2011.

[64] Linehan 1993.

[65] Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson 1999.

[66] On metaphorical language, see **Dh 97 Two levels of religious language**, SD 10.6.

[67] Hayes & Melancon 1989; Stewart, Barne-Holmes, Hayes & Lipkens 2001.

treat language with language. Metaphor allows an ACT or DBT therapist to take the "self " out of a particular situation and allow us, the client, to see how dysfunction can occur through natural human processes. In addition, paradox can be used to illustrate the futility of our current actions to achieve desired goals.

3.0.1.3 THE INSULA. Brain scientists tell us that a single part of our brain—**the insula**[68]—processes both our physical and psychic pain.[69] Buddhists are generally unconcerned with the location of mental processes, but are more concerned with how we use our head and heart, our thinking and feeling, and how they depress us or uplift us. By understanding how they can depress us, we learn to accept them unconditionally, and by that process we uplift our spirit. All this help us cultivate wisdom, experience-based wholesome knowledge.

For that reason, the early Buddhist suttas are rich in wordplay, figures, parables, metaphors and stories. This reflects a clear practical awareness in the suttas of the intimate overlap between the literal and the figurative, the letter and the spirit. Where for us the word of Dharma falters, its spirit prevails.[70]

3.0.1.4 RIGHT SPEECH. ACT also has a habit of using dramatic-sounding phrases and terms. To highlight the ineffectiveness and the costs of experiential avoidance, for example, ACT refers to it as *creative hopelessness* or *confronting the agenda*. If this to evoke a sense of hopelessness in our agenda of controlling our thoughts and feelings (as a counselee), it opens us up to alternate agenda of mindfulness and acceptance, which is the very opposite of control.

In Buddhist discourse (which includes counseling), right speech (*sammā,vācā*) (one of the factors of the eightfold path) is vital. Essentially, what is spoken by us should be truthful (true and timely), promoting concord, pleasant ("touching the heart") and helpful (conducive to the goal of personal growth).[71] In short, right speech is not only a means of communication, but it is for the timely communicating of truth, that promotes friendliness and happiness, all of which conduces to mental health and liberating wisdom. All these qualities define the communicating skills of a counselor.

The suttas record various characteristics of effective teaching and the teacher's skillful means. As a rule, a sutta would generally have three basic parts: *the opening* where the teacher (usually the Buddha) would state what he is going to teach, *the main corpus* (the teaching itself), and *the conclusion* which closes what has been taught. We have here a public speaker's rule of thumb: tell the audience what we are going to speak about, then speak about it, and finally tell them that we have done so. This is an effective way of confirming the message, that is, a kind of instructive reiteration.

3.0.1.5 MYSTICAL LANGUAGE. The suttas also uses various stock phrases or formulas for familiar teachings, such as the eightfold path, the totality formula, dependent arising, the streamwinning formula, the solitude sequence, and the arhathood formula.[72] For the audience or counselee, these formulas act as

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[68] The insula ("island") or insular cortex (properly pl insulae) are an oval region of the cerebral cortex overlying the extreme capsule, lateral to the lenticular nucleus, buried in the depth of the fissura lateralis cerebri (sylvian fissure), separated from the adjacent frontal, parietal, and temporal opercula by the circular sulcus of insula. The insulae are believed to be involved in consciousness, and their diverse functions usually linked to emotion or the regulation of the body's homeostasis (internal balance). These functions include perception, motor control, self-awareness, cognitive functioning, and interpersonal experience, and in this connection is involved in psychopathology: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insular_cortex. See also McGill Univ, "The brain from top to bottom"; R Droual, "Brain stem model: Insula & Corpus callosum," Youtube video.

[69] See Sapolsky 2010; also Sandra Blakeslee, "A small part of the brain, and its profound effects": NY Times, 4 Feb 2007: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/06/health/psychology/06brain.html.

[70] See **Language and discourse,** SD 26.11: The nature of language.

[71] See eg **Sañcetanika S** (A 10.206,9), SD 3.9.

[72] On the eightfold path pericope, see **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,4), SD 1,1; the totality formula (for the 5 aggregates), **(Dve) Khandhā S** (S 22.48,6-10) & SD 17.1a (3); dependent arising, see **Kaccā(ya)na,gotta S** (S 12.15,8), SD 6.13; the streamwinning formula, see **(Sekha) Uddesa S** (A 3.85,2.5), SD 3.3(2) (shorter), **Pañca Vera Bhaya S** (S 12.41,3.3), SD 3.3(4.2) (medium), **Nakula S** (A 6.16,2.6), SD 5.2 (full); the solitude sequence, *Viveka,-nissita,* SD 20.4; and the arhathood formula, **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,22.2), SD 1.2.

mnemonics for key ideas in the Buddha's teaching, while for the teacher or counselor, they serve as themes for elaboration to inspire the audience or counselee.[73]

When teaching special individuals (especially those who are spiritually mature and ready), the Buddha would use (what would appear to the unawakened as) dramatic or enigmatic language, such as in the cases of conversions of the fire-worshipping Kassapa brothers, the serial killer Aṅgulimāla, the bark ascetic Bāhiya Dāru,cīriya, the denial-defensive Kisā Gotamī, the love-struck acrobat Ugga,sena and the perspicacious weaver's daughter of Āḷavī.[74]

Indeed, as we have noted [3.0.1.2], ACT therapists, too, have a penchant for using metaphors and figurative language. Such a language acts as a sort of "middle ground" or "intentional language"[75] which seems to rise above ordinary language and the language of suffering that haunts us (the counselee). Hence, we are initiated, as it were, into a new, wholesome and refreshing way of speaking, thinking and healing.

3.0.2 The 6 core processes of ACT

3.0.2.1 HOW TO ACT. An ACT perspective of psychological health is a process of increasingly living our lives in accordance with our chosen values, while maintaining a non-defensive contact with our psychological responses (sensings, thoughts, feelings, memories). Such psychological health is available to anyone. All we need to do is to "ACT"—here meaning to Accept, Choose, and Take action.[76]

According to Hayes, ACT interventions are designed as **a set of 6 core processes or stages**, thus:

(1) **Contact the present moment.** Present to the moment: Be here now! Reducing cognitive fusion through the use of exercises and paradoxical and process-oriented language in therapy. [3.1]
(2) **Self-as-context.** We're *not* what we think. Watch what you're thinking. Undermining experiential avoidance by confronting the costs of that avoidance and the conflict it produces with counselee's or our values (in due course). [3.2]
(3) **Defusion.** An umbrella works best when it's open: overcoming cognitive fusion. Acceptance and willingness to open up as an alternative coping response, and to practice deliberate defused exposure to troublesome thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and the like. [3.3]
(4) **Acceptance.** Being true to ourself: the mindful self and pure awareness. Help the counselee or ourself in maintaining contact with a transcendent sense of self that makes acceptance and cognitive defusion less fearsome, through the use of exercises and practices. [3.4]
(5) **Values.** Enriching our lives: knowing what matters and clarifying our life's values. [3.5]
(6) **Committed action.** A purposeful life: committed action, doing what it takes. Living in keeping with chosen values through behavioural commitment strategies. [3.6]
    (Hayes 2002:60; also Hayes, Shenk, Masuda & Bunting 2006:436-439 & Harris 2009:9)

3.0.2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY. ACT therapy examines our present behavioural narrowness that is a source of psychopathology and works to increase "psychological flexibility" in us. Psychological flexibility is the ability to contact the present moment more fully as a conscious human being, and based on what the situation affords, changing or persisting in behavior in the service of chosen values.[77] Psychological flexibility is established in ACT through the 6 core processes mentioned [3.0.2.1]. As shown in the diagram, these processes can be categorized into two larger and overlapping groups: (1) commitment

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[73] On the stylistic and compositional nature of early suttas, see Mark Allon, *Style and Function,* Tokyo, 1997 esp 15-17.

[74] On the Kassapa brothers, see **Uruvela Pāṭihāriya** (V 1:24-35), SD 63.2 & SD 30.8 (3.4.3); Aṅgulimāla, **Aṅgu-li,māla Sa** (M 86,5.3)**,** SD 5.11 & SD 30.8 (3.4.1.1); Bāhiya Dāru,cīriya, **(Arahatta) Bāhiya S** (U 1.10), SD 33.7- (2); Kisā Gotamī, SD 43.2 & SD 30.8 (3.4.1.1); Ugga,sena, **Ugga,sena Vatthu** (DhA 24.6/4:59-65) & SD 10.6 (5.2); and the weaver's daughter, **Pesakāra,dhītā Vatthu** (DhA 13.7/3:170-176), SD 10.6 (6.1). See also **Dh 97,** SD 10.6, & **Skillful neans,** SD 30.8.

[75] See **Dh 97: Religious language,** SD 10.6 (5).

[76] Cf Emery & Campbell 1986.

[77] Hayes 2004; Hayes, Strosahl, Bunting, Twohig & Wilson 2005.

and behaviour change processes (the behaviour aspect) and (2) mindfulness and acceptance processes (teh cognitive aspect). In early Buddhism, the behaviorist (moral conduct training) and the cognitive (concentration training) form respectively the first two of the 3 trainings [3.6.1.1].
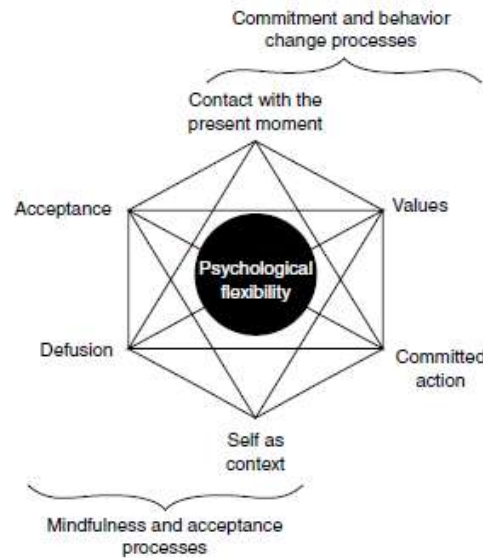

Fig 3. The facets of mindfulness processes and commitment processes underlying ACT.
(Source: Hayes, Shenk, Masuda, & Bunting 2006:436)

These 6 core ACT processes are well known.[78] Here these processes are summarized and commented on in preparation for a closer look at ACT in the light of early Buddhism.[79]

3.1 CONTACT WITH THE PRESENT MOMENT

3.1.1 Confronting the agenda. Here, the counselor attempts to evoke a sense of "creative hopelessness" in us (the counselee) in order to "confront the agenda," or "touch the present moment." As a counselee, we often come to a session to determine the "cause" of suffering, and then eliminate it. However, this works out to be an ironic cause and effect cycle, where we think, "If I had more confidence in myself, I wouldn't be so anxious in new social situations." As we struggle to gain confidence, the less confident we become!

In ACT lingo, this does not work because human suffering arises in part from natural and habitual human verbal processes, which are worsened by cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance, as is suggested by RFT [2.1]. As a counselee, we need to understand that what we have been seeing as a possible solution to our problem is actually a part of the problem. In short, doing what seems rational and normal here is really pathological.

Hence, at this first stage, the counselor works in therapy with us, the counselee, to reduce cognitive fusion through the use of exercises, and paradoxical and process-oriented language. We are asked to consider whether our having psychological pain is in part because of our trying to get rid of that pain—this is what makes it really painful. This stage may not be easy because, in effect, we are asked to "stop trying to get rid of psychological pain."

3.1.2 Letting go. Here, we can use the parable of a monkey whose hand is trapped in a coconut. The greedy monkey puts its hand into a hollowed out coconut, clinging to a piece of banana inside it. When

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[78] Strosahl 2002:4-7; Hayes 2002:60-62; Harris 2009:9-12. See also:
http://www.actmindfully.com.au/acceptance_&_commitment_therapy.
[79] Hayes, Shenk, Masuda &Bunting 2006:436-447.

the trapper comes along, the monkey, fettered and hindered by its hand being stuck in the coconut, is caught. It only needs to let go of the fruit inside the coconut, and so be free to flee!

We need to let go of our language and thinking that reifies or projects the problem. The purposes of the creative hopelessness phase are to undermine rationalization, prevent experiential avoidance, and to disconnect language from its normal, literal functions.

The ACT counselor is likely to ask us, the counselee, "Which are you going to believe here? Your mind or your experience?" Often, the goal of this stage is simply to get us to stop using unworkable strategies. At the same time, the counselor is trying to prepare us to see the problem in a bigger context. He is told, in short: Be here now.

The opening verses of the Dhammapada are germane here:

> Phenomena are preceded by the mind [consciousness],
> for them the mind is supreme, they are mind-made,
> If one speaks or acts with a defiled mind,
> Suffering follows one like the wheel the ox's hoof.   (Dh 1)

> Phenomena are preceded by the mind [consciousness],
> for them the mind is supreme, they are mind-made,
> If one speaks or acts with a clear [undefiled] mind,
> Happiness follows one like an undeparting shadow.   (Dh 2)[80]

3.2 SELF-AS-CONTEXT

3.2.1 Live life! In this stage, we, the counselee, are made more aware of the unworkable, ironic nature of control and elimination strategies, and their natural result: experiential avoidance. We are shown how to remove **experiential avoidance** by understanding its costs and the conflict it produces with our values.

For us, the counselee, to remove the negative effects of experiential avoidance, we must determine what situations or experiences we are avoiding as a result of our negative controlling. Next, we must evaluate whether this avoidance is really "paying off, that is, our sufferings are reduced and positive feelings increasing.

For example, a young man devastated at being rejected or broken up with different girls might be asked to determine whether avoiding dating has actually increased or decreased his sense of mistrust of women, increased or decreased his sense of relationship failure, and so on.

3.2.2 Live now! Here is a remarkable ancient parable from Chinese Buddhism (probably apocryphal) which I have retold with some modifications and a modern commentary for our purposes here:

> A man wandering in a forest is chased by a tiger. Running for his life, he finds himself at the edge of a cliff. He sees a strong vine, and holding on to it, climbs down, while the tiger paces up and down menacingly above him. Far below him, he sees mud and river water, where a hungry crocodile is waiting for him. So he remains hanging for his life halfway down the cliff. The warm sun shines on him, and the gentle wind cools him. Then he hears some scrapping sounds above him. Two mice, one black, the other white, are gnawing at the vine holding him. Some honey has trickled onto the vine, and the mice are feasting on it. The man carefully climbs back up towards the honey-comb, chases the mice away, and feasts on the honey. Having sweetly feasted and feeling strengthened, he then sees a cave hidden behind the rocks and undergrowth. He climbs into it and finally rests.

The man is, of course, Everyman, each and everyone of us. The tiger is the eternalist view (belief in some kind of eternal soul, supreme being, or eternal suffering), while the crocodile is the annihilationist view (the belief that this is our only life, an amoral one at that). The cliff is the human life and its unsur-

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[80] For both verses, see SD 17.3(6.3), SD 17.8a(4.5), SD 18,1(3.2).

mountable issues of health and happiness. The cliff is <u>earth</u>, the sun <u>fire</u>, there is <u>water</u> below the man, and the <u>wind</u> blows on him. These are the four primary elements that are all around us and also constitute us. We literally come and go with these elements.

The vine is <u>our human spirit</u> or the <u>divinity</u> within: it is our potential for creativity and goodness, truth and beauty—the middle way out of suffering. The honey represents <u>worldly happiness</u>, and the honey-comb <u>divine bliss</u> or happiness hereafter (depending on our faith). As for the mice, the white one is *day*, the black one *night*; together they represent <u>time</u> eating away at us if we do not act proactively. In such a predicament, the best thing we can do is to feed on the sweet honey of the moment, giving us the strength we need. If we do the right thing, the next right thing is likely to follow. The man in the parable finds a cave, which represents true and meaningful happiness, that is <u>nirvana</u>. (The cave actually leads into an-other part of the forest, so that he safely goes his way, as he wishes.)[81] Here, this means the total cessation of our problem.

3.2.4 Accept ourself. Such stories, if they are too long, need not be told in full. It should only high-light a point or inspire us (the counselee). Furthermore, it is the *story*, not the story-teller, that heals. This means that, as far as ACT therapy goes, the story can be retold or the metaphor trimmed to fit the counse-lee's or our need. The purpose of such stories and metaphors is to evoke an unconditional self-acceptance in us, the counselee. The best tool here is that of lovingkindness (*mettā*) in the context of the 4 divine emotions (*brahma,vihāra*).[82]

The 4 divine emotions are lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity. <u>Lovingkindness</u> (*mettā*) is the first of them. Just as it is said that charity must begin at home,[83] even more so, *lovingkind-ness should begin with ourself*, that is, we have to unconditionally accept ourself, warts and all,[84] as it were, before we can really accept others in the same spirit. Self-hate tends to make a person generally destructive and, if he is religious, he tends to be painfully intolerant, too.[85]

The best, even the only, way to enjoy lovingkindness is to cultivate it: we only have love when we give it away. If we are the troubled counselee, fixed in an idea of a negative self, we could sit before an-other empty chair and imagine that our alter ego (or other self) is sitting there. As part of the uncondition-al acceptance exercise, we can calmly and joyfully ("smile in our heart") say to "our other," "I accept you completely. I accept you just as you are. I forgive you for everything," and so on. Such sentences should be spoken out or subverbalized a couple of times, and then we mentally and mindfully direct or shine that light of lovingkindness towards the other self.[86] Otherwise, we can simply direct such a process to ourself.

3.2.5 The will to be. Generally, the notion of **willingness** is introduced in this stage to displace con-trol, elimination and avoidance. Willingness is the *unconditional* acceptance of unpleasant private content into our own consciousness, that is, without any evaluation or struggle. Often, as ACT counselees, we will be asked to keep a "willingness-suffering-workability" diary that records data on the relationship between the levels of willingness, intensity of suffering, and perceived workability of our lives. In other ACT exercises and thought experiments, we (as counselees) are taught to examine and score our own efforts to control private events throughout the day.

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[81] For other details, see "The hanging man" (R308) 130904.

[82] Also called divine abodes, perfect abidings, levels of true love, the positive emotions, qualities of a leader, cri-teria of professionalism, etc. See ***Brahma,vihāra,*** SD 38.5.

[83] As early as around 1380, John Wycliffe, the English theologian and dissident in the Roman Catholic Church had written; "Charity should begin at himself." In 1642, Sir Thomas Browne, an English physician, wrote "Charity begins at home."

[84] This phrase means to accept something, or more usually someone, unconditionally. It is attributed to Oliver Cromwell, in his remark to the artist, Peter Lely, who painted Cromwell's portrait when he became Lord Protector of England (1653). Cromwell was recorded as saying, "Mr Lely, I desire you would use all your skill to paint your picture truly like me, and not flatter me at all; but remark all these roughness, pimples, warts, and everything as you see me. Otherwise, I will never pay a farthing for it."

[85] On lovingkindness, further see ***Brahma,vihāra,*** SD 38.5 (3).

[86] For instruction on <u>the cultivation of lovingkindness</u> (*mettā,bhāvanā*), see **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Sn 1.8 = Khp 9), SD 38.3.

Lovingkindness empowers us to accept ourself as we are, instead of struggling with how wrong we are and how right we should be. These are merely thinking, the application of language, a reifying of our passing problems. The problem with such a habit is that it makes what is passing or past seems to become a permanent painful reality. So now we really *have* issues. To "have" something means that it is not really or naturally a part of us, but we have forced it upon ourself. It is a language-created situation, but the word is the *not* the thing; the name is not the thing named.[87]

Hence, here: to *have* is to suffer; to *be* is to heal. We need to free ourself of the language of having; we need to be our true to ourself. The best way to *be* is to truly and wholesomely <u>feel</u>. To feel is to look directly into our problem directly,and to see it for what it really is beyond language and concepts.

To do this, we can begin with a short and simple mindfulness of the breath [6.3.1.4], and smiling in our hearts as we watch our breath. Then feel the joy and peace that follow. This is the way to *be* happy.

We need to gently and constantly remind ourself that we are *not* a problem person: we are only a person *with* a problem. As you think, so you *have*; as you feel, so you *are*.[88] What you have is imperma-nent; what you are will help you truly see yourself. Truly seeing yourself helps you grow.

3.3 DEFUSION
3.3.1 Deliteralizing

3.3.1.1 The goal of this stage is to help us (the counselee) let go of the literal meanings we have giv-en to our private experiences, and to see these private experiences as not forming our basic self. This is a critical endeavour, but may be a very difficult one, as it entails our accepting the most provocative and negative forms of private experiences but without the perspective of a skilled observer.

At this stage, ACT employs a wide variety of "deliteralizing" strategies. A <u>deliteralization strategy</u> generally seeks to understand the functional or representational nature of language, revealing how they conceal the true nature of reality. This allows us to see thoughts as thoughts, feelings as feelings, reasons as reasons, evaluations as evaluations, and so forth.

3.3.1.2 An effective tool here is found in "<u>the Bāhiya teaching</u>" [2.2.1.4], the essence of which is that whatever that is "seen, heard, sensed and cognized" are simply the seen, the heard, the sensed, the cogniz-ed, nothing more, nothing less. This teaching helps us to see the difference between *belief* and *reality*. <u>Belief</u> means not wanting to know the truth; <u>reality</u> is what is actually inside and right before us. This is the crux of *satipaṭṭhāna* (the focus of mindfulness), that is, the meditation that frees our mind from mental hindrances, and can bring us to a most profound level of mental bliss. [6.3.1.1]

However, at this early stage, it is sufficient to use this teaching for the sake of removing or correcting any projective tendencies, that is, for deliteralizing. This is the tool I often use and call "<u>disowning the pain</u>." The locus classicus for this method is **the Anattā Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 3:68),[89] where the Sutta instructs us that such experiences are <u>not</u> to be seen in of the following ways:

"This is mine"	*etam mama*	which arises through craving	*taṇhā*
"This I am"	*eso'ham asmi*	which arises from conceit	*māna*
"This is my self"	*eso me attā*	which arises from wrong view	*diṭṭhi*.

In short, such experiences are not "beliefs" but <u>direct experiences</u> of reality. As a counselee, in other words, we are taught to keep our minds open: an umbrella only works when it's open. Then, in its shelter, we can safely see the rain and lightning, feel the cool and wet, hear the rain-drops and thunder.

3.3.1.3 Now that we, the counselee, have shown willingness to accept ourself through the helpful exercises and metaphors, the counselor will gently present us with other possible alternative methods for coping with our troublesome thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and so on. However, before this is actually done, we should learn (or be shown by counselor) how to create **a safe base** where we are able to open up to previously avoided private events without being overwhelmed. This safe base is the mind itself, and the way there is through cognitive defusion. [3.3.2.5]

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[87] See **Memes,** SD 26.3 (5.1.2).
[88] See "To have or to be?" (R166) 2010.
[89] S 3:68 = SD 1.2.

3.3.2 Cognitive defusing

3.3.2.1 FUSION AND DEFUSION. Deliteralizing [3.3.1], when properly done, prepares us for removing cognitive fusion or to cognitively defuse. **Fusion** comes from the Latin *fundere,* "to pour, melt." We could imagine pouring different kinds of molten metals into a mould so that they fuse or meld together. Or, we could imagine an electrical *fuse* that melts and breaks the power circuit, cutting off the electrical supply, so that all the electrical fixtures and appliances would not work: the house or building becomes dark, stifling and powerless.

We suffer when we fuse or pour together our direct experiences, projections of direct experiences, thoughts, feelings, and so on. We are then swallowed up in a maelstrom of private and limiting events, so that it becomes difficult for us to separate what is real from what is projected. It is as if our "fuse" has blown and our mind stops working, or falls into a dark and despairing mode.

The process of self-healing begins defusing ourself from our experiences: we must learn, at least at first, to be an observer of our own mental processes, if we are ever to free ourself from our own self-limiting projective constructions or defusion. We have to learn *not* to identify with our own "literal" readings of our own experiences.

3.3.2.2 EVEN FAMOUS TEACHERS CAN HAVE WRONG VIEWS. Even at this level of therapy, the ACT theory is efficacious in helping us understand what other psychotherapists call "**maladaptive cognition**," which in some important ways, overlap with the ACT notion of literalizing and cognitive fusion. Maladaptive cognition refers to a pathological thought pattern often attended by "irrational beliefs," which are beliefs that we hold even though they are untrue. As such, it causes and maintains our emotional problems.

This may happen even in pious or well-known religious teachers and practitioners (Buddhist or otherwise), especially through transference and counter-transference.[90] This is not surprising at all, since (according to early Buddhism) only the streamwinner and the other saints[91] have abandoned "maladaptive cognitions," that is, self-identity view, attachment to rituals and vows, and spiritual doubt.[92] More broadly, these 3 fetters, as they are called (since they hinder us from from awakening), are the narcissism, superstition and insecurity, we often see in a guru-figure or their devotees.[93]

Even then, in the case of the streamwinner and the once-returner, they have only given up basic views, beliefs and assumptions, so that they do not automatically sublimate (or find excuses for) their latent tendencies,[94] that is, emotions and drives triggered by lust, aversion and ignorance.[95] In other words, if we are not even streamwinners, no matter how high a guru we might have been canonized or perceived to be, we will still have clay feet. As the Buddha wisely reminds us, "Even famous teachers have wrong views."[96]

We might be very virtuous or wise or endeavour to be virtuous and wise, so that, as a rule, we attend to our sense-experiences wholesomely; we might even appear good and religious. However, despite all

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[90] When both tranference and counter-transference work together between teacher and pupil, and they are caught up blindsight, we have a classic case of a cult.

[91] The streamwinner is the first of the 4 kinds of sainthood (those on the path to awakening); the other 3 are the once-returner, the non-returner, and the arhat: see **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22,42-47), SD 3.13 & **Ānâpāna,sati S** (M 118,9-12), SD 7.13.

[92] See **Emotional independence,** SD 40a.8.

[93] Where such a relationship is pathological, it is likely to be the result of "transference" and "counter-transference": see SD 24.10b (2.1).

[94] On latent tendencies, see *Anusaya,* SD 31.3.

[95] See **Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 14) where the layman Mahānāma,a once-returner, asks the Buddha why despite his spiritual attainment, he still has thoughts of lust, hate and delusion. The Buddha replies that he has yet to progress at least a stage further to overcome the roots of sensual desires (M 14.2/1:91), SD 4.7.

[96] **(Ahita) Thera S** (A 5.88) says that even a monastic or teacher who is elderly, famous, wealthy and deeply learned may have "wrong view and deviant vision" (*micchā,diṭṭhiko hoti viparīta,dassano*). However, they need be so, so that they establish the masses in the true teaching, bringing them true and lasting happiness (A 5.88), SD 40a.-16.

this, we are still capable of acting in the some wrong or neurotic ways (at least in terms of thinking).[97] That is why religious dignitaries, even those with all kinds of status and titles, still badly mess themselves up and hurt others.[98] The point is that they are not even streamwinners yet. For, if they are, they would have the strength not to break even the five precepts.[99]

The point here is that an understanding of Buddhist teachings and of psychotherapy, such as ACT, would surely equip us with sufficient mindfulness and insight to detect warning signs of any pathological tendency within ourself. Such early (or even late) self-healing, with honest determination, would help us and bring us back to the middle path of mental health and spiritual joy.

3.3.2.3 WE MUST BE SOMEBODY BEFORE WE CAN BE NOBODY. Now we come to a sort of ironic twist in the ACT therapeutic process, that is, <u>we must have a self before we can be selfless</u>.[100] This has to do with an understanding acceptance of one of the key Buddhist notions, that of **non-self** (*anattā*). Essentially, this means that since everything in this conditioned universe is impermanent, changing and becoming other, there is nothing substantial or permanent, no abiding entity, such as a self or soul.[101]

<u>Non-self</u> is the third and last of **the 3 universal characteristics** (*ti,lakkhaṇa*), that is, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self.[102] This is not an easy teaching to fathom, much less to accept, unless we fully understand and accept the first two characteristics. Obviously, someone who needs any kind of psychotherapy means that he has not fully grasped the notion of non-self, that there is no "person" or "self" to suffer in the first place. As the 5th-century commentator Buddhaghosa famously puts it, "There is only suffering, no sufferer is found."[103] [7.3.2]

As such, we (the counselee) should begin by cultivating a wholesome "self" (*attā*), here meaning the mind or heart, a sort of self-image, as far as conventional language goes. The best way to do this is for us to do either the breath meditation or the cultivation of lovingkindness. However, as we are discussing the ACT process here, let us examine one of its exercises that can help us have a positive self-image: this is called the "observer exercise."

3.3.2.4 THE OBSERVER EXERCISE (a variant of the "self-identification exercise" developed by Assagioli),[104] is designed to lay the basis for a sense of self here and now, providing us with a context for cognitive defusion. This is, in fact, a key ACT exercise. It is summarized here as follows:

The counselee sits with eyes closed. After some time helping us (the counselee) to centre ourself, the counselor continues instructing us to self-observe (as informed by Hayes):

"I want you to remember something that happened last summer. Raise your finger when you have an image in mind. Good. Now just remember all the things that were happening then. Remember the sights... , the sounds.., your feelings.... And as you do that, see if you can notice that you were there then noticing what you were noticing. See if you can catch the person behind your eyes who saw, and heard, and felt. You were there then, and you are here now. I'm not asking you to believe this. I'm not making a logic point. I am just asking you to note the experience of being aware and

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[97] Take the case of the streamwinner, Ānanda, the Buddha's personal attendant, who, traumatized by the Buddha's impending death, declares, "Bhante, I have seen the Blessed One in comfort, and I have seen the Blessed One enduring it. And, bhante, my body has become weak [unwieldy] as if drugged [drunk]. I'm disoriented and things are unclear to me as a result of the Blessed One's illness": see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.2.24/2:100), SD 9; also S 47.-13/5:162; Tha 1034. See also the case of the layman Mahānāma, in **Cūḷa Dukkh-k,khandha S** (M 14,4), SD 4.7 qu above.

[98] On the problem of resorting to the cloth for charisma, see **Wanderers of today,** SD 24.6b & also Piyasilo, *Charisma in Buddhism,* Petaling Jaya (Malaysia), 1992h.

[99] For a study of such problems, see **Bad friendship,** SD 64.17.

[100] See "You have to be somebody before you can be nobody" (R128) 2010.

[101] On <u>non-self</u> (*anattā*), see **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59) @ SD 1.2 (2) & **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16.

[102] See *Atam,mayatā,* SD 19.13 (1).

[103] *Dukkham eva hi, na koci dukkhito* (Vism 16.90/513): see SD 2.16 (17).

[104] Assagioli 1971:211-217.

see if it isn't true that in some deep sense the 'you' that is here now was there then. The person aware of what you are aware of is here now and was there then."   (Hayes 2002:61)

After several more cycles of such guidance toward various memories at different ages, the counselor continues to instruct us:

"You have been you your whole life. Everywhere you've been, you've been there noticing. This is what I mean by the 'observer you.' And from that perspective or point of view, I want you to look at some areas of living. Let's start with your body. Notice how your body is constantly changing. Sometimes it is sick and sometimes it is well. It may be rested or tired. It may be strong or weak. You were once a tiny baby, but your body grew. You may have even had parts of your body removed, like in an operation. Your cells have died and literally almost every cell in your body was not there as a teenager, or even last summer. Your bodily sensations come and go. Even as we have spoken they have changed. So if all this is changing and yet the 'you' that you call 'you' has been there your whole life, that must mean that while you have a body, as a matter of experience and not of belief, you do not experience yourself to be just your body. So just notice your body now for a few moments, and as you do this, every so often notice you are the one not- icing." [Give the counselee time to do this.]   (Hayes, 2002:61)

3.3.2.5 A SAFE BASE. Once, as a counselee, we understand how easily we can train ourself in some simple mindfulness or visualization exercise, we are ready to be taught how to defuse. Alternatively, we might be asked to produce multiple, different autobiographies; or, we might be taught a simple mantra, say, using the word "milk," which is repeated aloud in a focused and rapid way over and again until the word "goes away" and a guttural, chopping sound is all that is experienced.

Once we have established a safe base (essentially this is some level of calm self-confidence) [3.3.1.3], then we are ready to observe the realities within ourself and accept even distressing private content. As al- ready mentioned, this safe base is an inner peace that can be achieved through some kind of easy medita- tion or visualization.

Throughout this stage, however, we are exposed to the FEAR matrix [2.2], arising through cognitive fusion. A host of metaphors, stories, and exercises are then typically employed to attack our literal attach- ments to the cognitions, emotions, memories, and other private representations or projections arising from our experience.

3.4 ACCEPTANCE

3.4.1 Experience, not belief. We, the counselee, should by now have some understanding and expe- rience of how to be mindful, and ideally to attain some level of mental concentration or pure mindfulness. We learn how to watch what we are thinking. This allows us to hold within ourself a transcendent sense of self that empowers us to have unconditional acceptance and facilitate cognitive defusion with the help of further exercises.

The key exercise here is to examine roles, emotions, behavioural predispositions, thoughts, and mem- ories, with this goal:

"So as a matter of experience and not of belief, you are not just your body.., your roles... , your emotions..., your thoughts. These things are the content of your life, while you are the arena...the context..., the space in which they unfold. As you see that, notice that the things you've been struggling with, and trying to change, are not you anyway. No matter how this war goes, you will be there, unchanged. See if you can take advantage of this connection to let go just a little bit, secure in the knowledge that you have been you through it all, and that you need not have such an investment in all this psychological content as a measure of your life. Just notice the experiences in all the domains that show up, and as you do, notice that you are still here, being aware of what you are aware of...." [Leave a brief period of silence.]   (Hayes, 2002:61)

Such exercises help us, the counselee, to cultivate *a transcendent sense of self* for anchoring us in the here and now without being threatened by its difficult psychological contents.

3.4.2 The 3 selves of ACT. In ACT theory, there are 3 types of self, namely:

(1) Self as content, that is, a conceptualized self-image, a self-construct or self concept. This is the re-
sult of habitually telling ourself or are being told to us, a kind of "verbal self-construct" of characteristics
and attributes (eg, "I've never been able to attain my goals"). This is a rigid self that is often a source of
difficulties in therapy. We instinctively and vigorously try to defend this "self concept," even when such a
construct is negative. This is a fixed self-identity.

(2) Self as process, that is, our stream of thoughts, which reflects the ability to report current mood
states, thoughts, verbal analyses, and other products of direct experience. This self is vital for psycholog-
ical health, as it is the vehicle for experiencing the "here and now." Avoidance or lack of this type of self
is likely to result in the most basic but severe forms of psychopathology.

(3) Self as context or contextual self is the most basic sense of self that is possible, according to ACT.
It is our awareness and consciousness, our mind itself. It is a transcendent self in the sense that it has no
limits or boundaries, as it is everything that we were, we are, and can be. It is immutable in the sense that
it has no form (unlike the other types of self). It is the stage or context to which all private events make
reference. [8]

Whatever the nature of our struggles, they are all acted out on this contextual stage of consciousness.
The integrity of this consciousness is not at issue. If we are able to access this self, we will find the safe
base from which all private experiences can be safely observed. In ACT, this is referred to as the "you
that you call you." Consequently, ACT employs a wide variety of mindfulness, awareness, and meditation
exercises to cultivate this inner connection.

3.5 VALUES
3.5.1 Choice

3.5.1.1 Given the self-perpetuating, self-fulfilling and cyclic nature of private experiences, we really
have very little control over our instinctive, often instantaneous, reactions triggered by various stimulus
events. The painful reality is that it is a darkly secretive and wildly reactive subhuman self. Buddhist cos-
mology speaks of the 6 realms of beings: the humans, the gods, the asuras, the animals, the pretas, and the
hell-beings. The last four are the subhuman realms of cyclic sufferings. We can metaphorically speak of
our sufferings as our falling into any of these *subhuman* planes.[105] As such, we need to work to keep our-
self within the human state (by willingness and ability to learn), if not the divine state (through the joy of
meditation).

3.5.1.2 In other words, we do have a choice whether we let ourself fall into the subhuman planes, or
we could uplift ourself into the presence of wisdom and joy. **Choice** is, in fact, a key ACT concept. In
Buddhist terms, such a choice is a heroic act, since we are venturing forth on our own wise effort. The
Buddhist word of effort is *viriya,* which comes from *vīra,* meaning "hero," and which comes from the
same root that means "virile.,"

According to Buddhist spirituality, we are meant to be heroes, to advance into self-awakening and full
liberation.[106] The point is that we are now ready to assert ourself to confront our emotions, thoughts,
memories, and so on.

3.5.2 Willingness

3.5.2.1 WILLINGNESS AS WISE CHOICE. Earlier on, we examined how, in ACT, willingness refers to a
non-judgmental awareness of negative private content [3.2.5]. However, there is a more vital form of
willingness that is central to ACT. Put into action, **willingness** is our choice to enter into valued life acti-
vities, with certain knowledge that we might react to feared, private experiences.

These "monsters" that have been harrassing us, and which we have been trying to avoid, are generally
associated with our reactions of control, elimination, and avoidance. As long as we do not act with wis-
dom, we lack wise choices, so that we are trapped in a cyclic rut. Here, the willingness is a qualitative act,
driven by our own wisdom and *choice*, rather than by persuasion or reasoning.

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[105] See **Pañca,gati S** (A 9.68), SD 2.20 & **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,37-41), SD 49.1 = SD 2.24. See also "World
of our own" (R115) 2012 & "We are not born human" (R216) 2011.

[106] See "Buddhas die if we worship them" (R200), 2011.

3.5.2.2 LEARNING TO CHOOSE. Many techniques are used to encourage defusion and willingness. Some of the ACT methods include the following:

- In the "jilted person" example, the willingness question that the counselor might ask us is, "Would you be willing to continue dating in the service of your dreams of developing intimacy, knowing that you will have to make room for mistrust, conditioned fear responses, self critical thoughts, even failure?"[107]
- Physicalizing or externalizing painful experiences (eg, "What color is it? What shape is it?")
- Practising language conventions that increase the distance between thoughts and their referents (eg, the convention of naming all reactions by kind, such as "I am having the thought that I'm going to lose control; and I am having the evaluation that this would be bad.").
- Practising defusing exercises (eg, saying a word over and over until all meaning is lost). [3.3.2.5]

Willingness, as such, means that we have empowered ourself to move forward to see our problems as they really are, to seek what really is of value to our personal growth, and to act on them for a full and wholesome life here and now.

3.5.1.3 THE 5 VALUES. Once we realize we do have choices in life, it means that we are willing and able to change for the better. But how do we know what our values should be? Early Buddhist teaching is a great help here, but we need to authenticate it with our own experience and understanding.

It's best to begin with the most basic question: **What is or should be of the foremost and greatest value to us?** The answer is really simple: life itself. For, without life, nothing else matters. Next comes those things that keep us basically happy: while life itself refers to our *being* (we are living), happiness here refers to our *having,* that is, our enjoying the basic supports of life (food, clothing, shelter, health), but which are really external to us. If we understand that true happiness lies in the ability to *enjoy* what we have, even if little, then we *are truly happy*.[108]

Our being and having are closely related to our *doing,* meaning a freedom of movement and action. And what makes all this worthwhile and purposeful is that they are based on truth, they reflect true reality. If life is our primary and foremost value, then wisdom is its highest purpose or goal. Our purpose in life should be to grow and be a free being.

When Buddhism says "life is suffering," it is a dramatic way of declaring that to live is to learn. Pain is a symptom that something is *not* right, and that we must move on to *right* it. Pain is natural, suffering is optional. If we are suffering, it means that we have not understood what the pain is really about. In this sense, suffering is our greatest teacher. That is one important reason why this is the first noble truth.

Putting all this together, Buddhism comes up with these 5 basic values—life, happiness (including health), freedom, truth, and wisdom—which the 5 precepts of natural morality[109] embody. Once we understand these values, our life becomes meaningful (we know *why* we suffer), and with that wisdom, it becomes purposeful: we know *how* to live and *what* to do next.

3.6 COMMITTED ACTION
3.6.1 Clarifying values
3.6.1.1 BASIC VALUIES. In ACT, the acceptance of previously avoided private events is not a goal in its own right. These are the coping strategies we are taught so that we are motivated or empowered to modify our behaviour in valued directions. ACT encompasses a detailed method of **value clarification**. ACT values are verbally constructed, universally desired life directions. In Buddhism, as we have seen [3.5.1.3], our basic values are, in a natural transformative sequence, namely: life, happiness (including health), freedom, truth and wisdom [3.5]. In this case, these values are more than merely verbal constructions, as they involve all our being: body, speech and mind.

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[107] For self-counseling, we should rephrase this question as: "Would I be willing to continue dating in the service of my dreams of developing intimacy, knowing that I will have to make room for mistrust, conditioned fear responses, self critical thoughts, even failure?"

[108] See "To have or to be?" (R 166) 2010.

[109] On the 5 precepts, see **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7), SD 1.5 (the first 4 precepts) & *Sīlānussati*, SD 15.11 (2.2)

The earlier stages of therapy present to us suffering as it is: this is the <u>meaning</u> of life, that is, we are an unfinished, on-going process. Now that we are empowered to rise above that suffering, we have a her-oic <u>purpose</u> in life. As in the Buddhist moral training (*sīla,sikkhā*) (the first of the 3 trainings),[110] ACT attempts to "jump start" our commitment in defining our life's core values. This is the moment to do what it takes. We live in keeping with chosen values through <u>behavioural commitment strategies</u>.

3.6.1.2 A PURPOSEFUL LIFE. A basic ACT intervention strategy is our counselor challenges us with, "What do you want your life to stand for?"[111] A further strategy involves <u>a role-play</u>: Imagine that we have died and are listening to eulogies from different significant others at our funeral. The question to be answered is, "How do you want to be remembered by those you leave behind?"

In ACT, counselee values are elaborated in several major domains (health, work, relationships, citizenship, and so on) and concrete actions need to be detailed. When such actions are identified, often barriers to attaining such goals would immediately emerge. They arise as private events, so that we need to again apply the strategies of acceptance, willingness, and defusion to these barriers. We may need to work with behavioural commitment exercises. This is where ACT appears to be more like traditional behaviour therapy, but the earlier work continues to inform behaviour-change efforts.

3.6.2 Goals

3.6.2.1 CORE QUESTION. The core question in ACT is this: Based on a distinction between us and the things we have been working with and trying to change, are we willing to experience those changes, fully and without defence, accepting them as they are, not as what they say they are, and to do what takes us in a valued direction here and now?

If we (the counselee) can answer *yes* to this question, then our life opens up a bit. If the answer is *no*, then, psychologically speaking, we close up a bit more. One way to help ourself here is to continue working on committed action. It is useful here for us to differentiate between <u>values as processes</u> and values as results.

To this end, ACT employs a variety of exercises that emphasize committed action as *a journey*, rather than a destination. A basic ACT principle is, "Goals are the process by which the process becomes the goal." Here, the journey itself is the destination.

3.6.2.2 BEYOND GOALS. **Goals** are the outcomes that are achieved while heading in a valued direction. So defined, values unfold as an ongoing process, they are not ever achievable in a static sense. For example, we can value being an honest, loving person, but that is not a concrete outcome that we can have as an object. No matter how long a value has been pursued, there is more to do if the value is retained. This is not true with goals. If someone said, "Well, I'm an honest person now," and stopped being honest, the value would have changed. A concrete goal is different. If someone said, "Well, I have my PhD now," and stopped working for the PhD, the goal would merely have been achieved. [3.6.2]

3.6.3 Moving on. It should be accepted that some values may not be achieved, but only acted on a continuing process. An example is the value of *being* a loving spouse. We may never "reach" the love we expect: we simply need to keep on giving that love in order to feel it. On the other hand, a loving act often occurs even when a feeling of love seems to be missing.

Furthermore, in the name of seeking vitality or efficacy here, we may have to abandon a favourite narrative we have been using to rationalize why meaning and purpose are unattainable. Often this story is that of a traumatic personal history and our need to remain dysfunctional to prove that a transgression has occurred. This is a blaming instinct by perpetuating the pain.

Instead of feeding the pain, we have the choice of "disowning" it [4.2.1.2]. The locus classicus for this self-healing is found in **the Dhammapada,** where the Buddha says:

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[110] <u>The 3 trainings</u> (*ti,sikkhā*) are the training in: moral virtue (ie body and speech) (*sīla,sikkhā*), in concentration (the mind) (*samādhi,sikkhā*), and in wisdom (the basis for liberation) (*paññā,sikkhā*): see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6. For <u>an analysis of the precepts</u>, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41), SD 5.7 (2). On <u>moral values</u>, see SD 1.5 (2.7+8).

[111] Or, in self-counseling, we can challenge ourself with: "What do I want my life to stand for?"

"He abused me! He beat me!	He defeated me! He stole from me!"	
those who harbour such thoughts	their anger does not subside.	(Dh 3)

"He abused me! He beat me!	He defeated me! He stole from me!"	
those who harbour *not* such thoughts	their anger as such subsides.	(Dh 4)[112]

Hence, we simply need to let go of the sense of blame, shame or trauma, in order to pursue vitality. In ACT, this form of forgiveness is construed to mean, "giving ourself the grace or acceptance that *is* before the transgression." A common ACT question we (the counselee) are asked is this, "Who would be made right, or who would have to be let off the hook of blame, if you have committed yourself to living a valued life?"

3.7 EFFECTIVENESS OF ACT. While an examination of the impact of ACT is beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that recent studies have reconfirmed its impact in randomized controlled trials with various clinical populations.[113] Effectiveness research has also shown that training in ACT produces generally more effective clinicians.[114]

As ACT heavily borrows from early Buddhist teachings and methods, it is strategic for ACT therapists to be as familiar as possible with early Buddhism, especially the suttas and meditation methods. Here, Buddhism is not seen as a religion that it grew to become after the Buddha, but as our going back directly to the Buddha and early Buddhism itself, as it were. This is easy today as we have many good sutta translations,[115] and experienced Buddhist meditation teachers are easily available, too.[116]

We will now examine some key teachings of early Buddhism that are relevant to ACT. As we read the following passages, we should note the cross-references, so that at the proper time we can read them up, too, for a more broad-based understanding of the early Buddhist worldview and counseling process.[117]

4 The universality of human suffering

4.1 THE 3 KINDS OF SUFFERING. In an important way, the whole of the ACT theory and practice is based on the Buddhist teaching of the 4 noble truths. This basic teaching is famously defined in the Buddha's very first discourse to the monks, called **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), or the discourse on the turning of the wheel of truth.[118]

The first noble truth is the acknowledgement that suffering is universal. It is comprehensively defined as being physical or bodily, mental or emotional, and spiritual. **The Dukkha Sutta** (S 38.14), using technical terms, categorizes suffering into these 3 kinds:

(1) affective suffering (*dukkha,dukkhatā,* literally, "the suffering of suffering"), due to physical and mental pain*,*
(2) temporal suffering (*vipariṇāma,dukkhatā*) or "suffering due to change," that is, due to the ending of pleasant feeling," and
(3) existential suffering or "suffering due to formations" (*saṅkhāra,dukkhatā*), that is, the inherent inadequacy in conditioned existence.   (S 38.14/4:259) SD 1.1(4.1)[119]

As far as the Buddha's teachings recorded in the early suttas go, he is less concerned with the alleviating of the first two sufferings, as he is with the third, that is, existential suffering. While the first two

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[112] See **(Thīna,middha) Tissa S** (S 22.84), SD 32.12. On the psychological import of these verses, see **Self & selves**, SD 26.9 (4.1): The self is language-constructed.

[113] Bach 2000; Bond & Bunce 2000.

[114] Strosahl, Hayes, Bergan, & Romano 1998.

[115] For a fully annotated translation of the early suttas, see the Sutta Discovery series: dharmafarer.org.

[116] See Sujato 2011.

[117] All references to sutta as primary sources and related essays by Piya Tan are available at the link below.

[118] S 56.11/5:421,5), SD 1.1.

[119] Also **Dukkhatā S** (S 45.165/5:56); **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.1.10(27)/3:216); see SD 1.1 (6).

kinds are only *symptomatic* of universal suffering (which can be healed or prevented in non-spiritual ways), the third is the *radical* problem or situation that needs to be addressed by knowing, taming and freeing the mind. Apparently, ACT is aware of this urgency and where it tries to address the roots of our psychological issues, it closely parallels the early Buddhist method of mind-training.

4.2 THE ACT VIEW OF SUFFERING

4.2.0 Buddhism and ACT. Proponents of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), of which ACT is a variation, generally accept the universality of suffering in a manner that closely parallels the Buddhist notion, that is to say, that "suffering is an inalienable part of existence, inflamed by any attempt to contain it" (Kumar, 2002:41). There is nothing negative or pessimistic about this: it is a realistic observation of our existence so that we can properly act to heal ourself. Indeed, not to see this, or worse, to reject such an approach, may reflect a delusive vision of life that only represses and reinforces the pain so that it continues to haunt and hurt us in subtle but real ways.

To understand suffering (*dukkha*) is to appreciate the human situation. The Buddhist approach rejects a theistic worldview so that it is free from any notion of sin, guilt or power mode. Instead, the Buddhist therapeutic system is one of unconditional self-acceptance, mental cultivation for activating self-healing, and self-actualization as a tool for spiritual liberation. The Buddha's teaching of "suffering" and the 4 noble truths essentially means that human life is a process of self-discovery, self-evolution and self-fulfillment.[120]

Since Buddhism empowers the individual without the need of any external agency (such as a God-idea) and bases its therapy on self-effort, it is natural and easy to be appreciated as an effective cross-cultural, even secular, psychotherapeutic system.[121] In fact, our understanding of the key concepts of ACT as represented by the acronym FEAR [2.2] facilitates a better appreciation of the Buddhist conception of the human state and Buddhism as a natural mind-healing therapy. This is what we will examine in the rest of this section.[122]

4.2.1 "Affective suffering."

4.2.1.1 TWO KINDS OF SUFFERING. Affective suffering is both *bodily* painful feeling and *mental* painful feeling, or more simply, "ordinary suffering." Since we all have a physical body, we must feel pain, or at least some discomfort at some time. Such pains might be alleviated through the changing of our postures,[123] but they are potentially there due to the physical nature of our bodies and the worldliness of our minds.

The **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11) defines affective suffering as consisting of the following: birth, decay; disease; death; grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.[124] Notice that the sufferings here are both physical and mental, that is, they refer to both the feelings of body and of mind; in other words, our whole being.

4.2.1.2 DON'T OWN THE PAIN. If we regard such experiences of pain as merely "private events," that is, we "own" these pains,[125] then we are very likely to suffer them on a deeper, personal level. We have made them virtually real. In ACT terms, this is called **cognitive fusion** [2.2.1]. On the other hand, we can simply take an "observer" role, and merely see such pains just as they are, without cognitively fusing with them, without "owning" them.[126] [3.6.3]

4.2.1.3 NOTHING IS WORTH CLINGING TO. In the conclusion of **the Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58), Moggallāna asks the Buddha how we are awakened. The Buddha begins by answering that the awakened

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[120] See **Meditation and consciousness,** SD 17.8c.

[121] On self-empowerment, see **Atta,kārī S** (A 6.38), SD 7.6.

[122] On ACT view of human suffering, see Hayes & Smith 2005:3-16.

[123] Vism 21.4/640.

[124] S 56.11,5/5:421), SD 1.1.

[125] "Owning the pain" means not identifying with our pains, ie, using such pronouns as "I, me mine," but to mindfully examine or simply observe them as being impermanent, and what we can learn from them. See Piya Tan, "How self-healing works" (R87), in *Simple Joys,* 2006 no 2.1, & "Don't own the pain" (R122), in *Healing Words,* 2010 no 19.

[126] See SD 39.3 (1.2.2).

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one has learned that "nothing is worth clinging to" (*sabbe dhammā nâlaṁ abhinivesāyā*). This teaching, well known as "the brief advice on liberation through the destruction of craving,"[127] is also spoken by the Buddha to Sakra (the leader of the gods) in **the Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 37). It runs thus:[128]

11.2 Here, the monk has learned [heard] that nothing is worth clinging to. And a monk has learned that nothing is worth clinging to, thus: he directly understands all things [he directly understands the nature of the all].[129] Having directly understood all things, he fully understands[130] all things.

11.3 Having fully understood all things, he knows whatever feelings there are, whether pleasant, painful or neutral [neither painful nor pleasant].
As regards to those feelings,
   he dwells contemplating <u>impermanence</u> in them;
      he dwells contemplating <u>dispassion</u> [fading away of lust] in them;
         he dwells contemplating <u>ending</u> (of suffering) in them;
            he dwells contemplating <u>letting go</u> (of defilements).
When he dwells contemplating impermanence in them, contemplating dispassion [fading away of lust] in them, contemplating ending (of suffering) in them, contemplating letting go (of defilements),
   he does not cling to anything in the world;
      not clinging, he is not agitated;
         not agitated, he attains nirvana for himself.
He understands. 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what is to be done, there is no more for this state of being.'   (A 7.58,11) + SD 4.11 (6) = (M 37,3), SD 54.8

4.2.2 "Temporal suffering"
4.2.2.1 SUFFERING DUE TO CHANGE. "Temporal suffering" is both bodily *pleasant* feeling and mental *pleasant* feeling, either of which brings suffering when any of them ends.[131] **The Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11) defines <u>temporal suffering</u> as consisting of the following: to be with the unpleasant;[132] to be without the pleasant;[133] not to get what one desires.[134]

The original term for this is *vipariṇāma,dukkha,* that is, "suffering in change." No matter what we get or do not get, they are both in a constant state of change, uncertainty, becoming other. We are unhappy or

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[127] *Saṅkhittena taṇhā,saṅkhaya,vimutto (ovādo).*
[128] The vocatives have been omitted. For nn on key terms, see **Pacalā S** (A 7.58,11), SD 4.11.
[129] "He <u>directly understands</u> all things," *so sabbaṁ dhammaṁ* **abhijānāti,** alt tr, "he directly understands the nature of the all." Here the "all" (*sabba*) refers to the 6 senses and their respective sense-objects (**Sabba S,** S 35.23/-4:15), SD 7.1.
[130] "He fully understands," **parijānāti,** here meaning "he comprehends, knows fully for certain." This spiritual knowledge is called **"full understanding"** (*pariññā*), of which there are 3 kinds: (1) Full understanding of the known (*ñāta,pariññā*), ie the discernment of the specific characteristics of a phenomena ("Form as the characteristic of being oppressed' feeling has the characteristic of being felt, etc"); (2) Full understanding by investigating (*tīrana,pariññā*), ie insight wisdom (*vipassanā,paññā*) which as the 3 universal characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, not-self) as its objects, and which arises when attributing a universal characteristic to a physical and mental state, eg "Form is impermanent; feeling is impermanent, etc"; (3) Full understanding as overcoming (or abandoning) (*pahāna,pariññā*), ie the insight-wisdom that has the universal characteristics as its objects, and arises after one has overcome the idea of permanence, etc". (Nm 52; Vism 20.3/606 f). Comy says that "full understanding" here refers to *tīrana,pariññā* (AA 4:43). The contemplation of impermanence (*aniccânupassanā*), etc, are given in the final tetrad (*dhammânupassanā,* contemplation of mind-objects) of the breath meditation of **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,21/3:83), SD 7.13 .
[131] **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.24/1:393), SD 40a.9.
[132] "The unpleasant," *appiya,* also tr "what one loves not."
[133] "The loved," *piya,* also tr "what one loves."
[134] S 56.11,5/5:421 = SD 1.1.

suffer when we are in an unpleasant situation. This is because a voice in our head tells us that it is "an unpleasant situation," or we have been telling ourself consciously that we do not like such a situation. And that is exactly what we get—because we have been telling ourself about this! What we say is what we get.

4.2.2.2 SIGNS AND DETAILS. In ACT terms, this reaction is said to be the result of **verbal evaluation** [2.2.2]. Through <u>cognitive fusion</u>, we attend to the "signs and details" (*nimitta anuvyañjana*) of a situation we see as pleasant or as unpleasant. When we tell ourself that this object is something <u>pleasant</u>, then we are "cognitively fused" [2.2.1] to it with delight. When we tell ourself that it is something <u>unpleasant</u>, then we are "fused" to it with pain.

When we are fused to something that we verbally evaluate as being pleasant, we fear that we might lose it—this is <u>clinging</u> (*upādāna*). When we are fused to something that we verbally evaluate as being unpleasant, we crave for its opposite—this is <u>craving</u> (*taṇhā*).

4.2.2.3 THE WORLDLY CONDITIONS. Either way, we are caught up with **experiential avoidance** [2.2.3]. In <u>clinging</u> to the object verbalized as pleasant, we work to experientially *avoid* losing it; thus we reinforce our suffering. In <u>craving</u> for the object not yet in our clutches, we work to experientially *avoid* whatever we see as not pleasurable or as hindering our quest for it; thus we reinforce our suffering.

Experiential avoidance become even more serious when we do not understand or accept the nature of <u>the 8 worldly conditions</u> (*loka,dhamma*), that is to say the world turns on these four pairs of worldly conditions: gain and loss, fame and obscurity, praise and blame, happiness and sorrow. In the world, trouble comes in pairs: where there is the one, the other is nearby. Where there is gain, there is loss; where there is fame, there is obscurity; where there is praise, there is blame; where there is happiness, there is sorrow.

There are two important and related discourses—**the Loka,dhamma Suttas 1 and 2** (A 8.5+6)—that instruct us on these worldly conditions. The foolish, when touched by any of these worldly conditions, see (verbalize) them as if they were permanent, lasting and unchanging. The wise, on the other hand, understand them, as they really are, to be "impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change."[135] We can call these "relative suffering," as they work in pairs, shuttling between themselves. According to **the Ṭhāna Sutta** (A 4.192), one who is *not* moved or shaken by these 8 opposing winds of adverse changes is said to have fortitude or emotional strength (*thāma*).[136] [2.2.3.2]

4.2.2.4 THE 2 EXTREMES. To avoid being caught between the Scylla and Charybdis[137] of suffering of the pairs of worldly conditions, we should observe them simply as passing phenomena, which is what they really are. The "sign" (*nimitta*) [4.2.2.2] is our very first glimpse, a first blush, of such a worldly condition. Once our attention is caught by this <u>sign</u> (say, a certain shape or colour), we then at once go on to examine the <u>details</u>. Something in our head keeps telling us, "What's this? I like this! This is great!"

To prevent our being sucked into this maelstrom of likes and dislikes, we must turn our attention away from the sign, once we notice it.[138] We need to do this before cognitive fusion propels us to identify with it, and then our verbal evaluation reinforces the suffering, and we are caught amidst the swing of the pendulum of experiential avoidance.

4.2.3 "The suffering of conditionality"
4.2.3.1 THE NATURE OF CONDITIONALITY. The suffering of conditionality is that of *all* conditioned phenomena of the three worlds,[139] because they are oppressed by the rise and fall of existence. According

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[135] (A 8.5+6), SD 42.2+3.

[136] (A 4.192,4), SD 14.12.

[137] Scylla and Charybdis were mythical sea monsters mentioned by Homer. Later Greek tradition located them on opposite sides of the Strait of Messina between Sicily and the Italian mainland. Scylla was a rock shoal (mythicized as a six-headed female sea-monster) on the Italian side of the strait, and Charybdis was a whirlpool off the coast of Sicily. An older Latin proverb runs thus: *Incidit in scyllam cupiens vitare charybdim* (He runs into Scylla, wishing to avoid Charybdis), meaning much the same as "jumping from the frying pan into the fire." See a related episode in the *Odyssey* (Homer, *Odyssey* 1.1), tr Samuel Butler, rev Power & Nagy (eds): search on the key words.

[138] For details, see *Nimitta* and *anuvyañjana,* SD 19.14.

[139] <u>The 3 worlds</u> are the sense world, the form world and the formless world, which effectively covers the whole of the universe as conceived by the early Buddhists: see **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (5.2).

to Buddhaghosa, this (*saṅkhāra,dukkha*) refers to "the equanimous feeling and the remaining formations of the three planes."[140] Suffice it here to say that this suffering pervades all the universe, that is, the conditioned world, human and otherwise (of course, except for nirvana, which is unconditioned).

For our purposes here, however, we shall limit our discussion only to the human world. In this connection, **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11) defines the suffering of conditionality (*saṅkhāra,dukkha*) as the suffering that is the 5 aggregates of clinging (*pañc'upādāna-k,khandha*).[141] These five aggregates constitute our whole being, mind and body, that is, we are composed of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.[142]

4.2.3.2 HOW CONDITIONS WORK. Both the physical universe and human existence share one common characteristic: they are both conditioned (*saṅkhata*). They arise and fall away cyclically in a network of causes and effects. The only difference is that for humans, this process is a conscious (*sa,viññāṇaka*) one.[143] As conscious beings, humans are instinctively aware of conditionality. In other words, we are capable of reasoning, that is, we have the capacity to understand how causes and effects work on each other.

However, as unawakened beings, we are only *instinctively* capable of noticing and understanding causal relationship merely in a physical or external way. This basic nature of causal relationship is technically known in early Buddhism as "specific conditionality" (*idap,paccayatā*), which is famously defined, thus:

> When this is, that is;   when this arises, that arises.
> When this is not, that is not;   when this ceases, that ceases"
>   (M 3:63; S 2:28, 95; see also V 1:5; D 1:85, 2:55; M 1:262; S 2:25, 5:71)[144]

It is important to understand here that this specific conditionality is not a linear process, but a network or, better, a matrix, of causes and effects working on one another, causes bringing about effects, which in turn become causes, bringing about their own effects, ad infinitum, or more correctly, *yāva,nibbāna,* "until nirvana is attained."[145]

The full and proper working of this specific conditionality is found in "dependent arising" (*paṭicca,-samuppāda*), a formulation of the complex interdependent working of all mental and physical phenomena revealing how they inherently lack any permanent entity (*attā*).[146] To fully understand this process, is to awaken to spiritual liberation.

4.2.3.3 NO ONE TO BLAME BUT CONDITIONS. Notice that when we are caught up in pain and suffering, we generally look for someone or something to blame. We look for answers *outside* of ourself, instead of looking at the very source of our problems: our own mind. This means that pain and suffering are occasions for learning, or more exactly, for self-learning, for self-understanding.

While the fully awakened saint or arhat is mentally liberated and free from any psychological issues, the saint on the path (those heading for awakening but not yet arhats) are still "learners" (*sekha*). For them, whatever problems they face are occasions for the evocation of positive emotions and self-knowing. In both cases, the arhat and the saints of the path are not caught up in rationalizing their pains. They understand that pain is natural, suffering is optional. Pain is *natural,* in the sense that we can learn from it, which helps us to evolve; suffering is *optional* in the sense that we can work to effectively lessen, even uproot, the pain.

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[140] *Upekkha,vedanā c'eva avasesā ca te,bhūmakā saṅkhārā udaya-b,baya,paripīḷitattā* **saṅkhāra,dukkhaṁ** (Vism 16.35/499).

[141] S 56.11,5/5:421 = SD 1.1.

[142] For details, see **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2.

[143] On *sa,viññāṇaka,kāya,* "the conscious body," see SD 17.8a (12.3).

[144] See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,19.2), SD 1.11 & **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (6).

[145] *Yāva,nibbāna* is a Pali neologism (not found in the suttas) but mostly in Burmese ethnic Buddhism, such as in this favourite aspirational verse: *Imina punna,kammena mā me bāla,samagamo, sataṁ samagamo hotu yāva,nibbā-na,pattiya,* "By the karmic merit, may the foolish not consort with me; may the wise consort (with me) until such time I have attained nirvana!"

[146] See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

   The untutored worldling, someone helplessly caught up in the world and its vicissitudes, exists in a reactive manner, troubled by pain, trying to make sense of it but, lacking therapeutic skills, only aggravate it into suffering. The unawakened person suffers from his pains, while the true individual learns from pain; hence, he cuts down suffering.

   4.2.3.4 **The (Jāti) Paccaya Sutta** (S 12.20) closes by stating that the noble disciple (the arhat, the path saints and the true individuals) are not caught up with these 16 doubts:

   18 Bhikshus, when a noble disciple has clearly seen, as they really are, with right wisdom,
this dependent arising and these dependently arisen phenomena,
      18.2 that he would ever run back to **the past,** thinking**:**
         (1) 'Now, *was* I in the past?'
         (2) 'Now, was I *not* in the past?'
         (3) 'Now, *what* was I in the past?'
         (4) 'How. *how* was I in the past?'
         (5) 'Now, having *been* what, did I become what in the past?'—this is impossible.
   19 or, that he would ever run up into **the future,** thinking**:**
         (6) 'Now, *will* I be in the future?'
         (7) 'Now, will I *not* be in the future`?'
         (8)   'Now, *what* will I be **[27]** in the future?'
         (9) 'Now, *how* will I be in the future?'
        (10) 'Now, having *been* what, will I become what in the future?'—this is impossible.
   20 or, that he would now be in doubt within himself about **the present,** thinking**:**
        (11) 'Now, *am* I?'
        (12) 'Now, am I *not*?'
        (13) 'Now *what* am I?'
        (14) 'Now *how* am I?'
        (15) 'Where, now, has this being come from?'
        (16) 'Where, now, will it [this being] go?'—this is impossible.
   21 What is the reason for this?
Because, bhikshus, the noble disciple has clearly seen, as they really are, with right wisdom,
this dependent arising and these dependently arisen phenomena."   (S 12.20,18-21), SD 39.5

   4.2.3.5 A worldling, untutored in dependent arising (the process of causes and effects or conditionality), on the other hand, is left only with an instinctive grasp of specific conditionality, a hazy view of causality [4.2.3.2]. Unfamiliar with the true nature of pain and suffering, and not understanding his own mental processes, the untutored worldling can only resort to conceptualizing and rationalizing or, to use the ACT term, **reason-giving** [2.2.4]. As we have seen, this is a crowd of mental-chatter reactivity that overwhelms the mind, so that we become virtual prisoners of our own thoughts, incapable of any joy or peace with ourself or with others.

5 The source of suffering: craving
   5.1 CRAVING, THE ARISING OF SUFFERING. The source of suffering or, better, the condition that brings it about, is craving (*taṇhā*), defined by the Buddha in the second noble truth as follows:

   Now this, bhikshus, is **the noble truth [reality] that is the arising of suffering**:[147] it is this craving that leads to renewed existence [rebirth], accompanied by pleasure and lust, seeking pleasure here and there; that is to say,[148]

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   [147] On the tr of this term, see SD 1.1 (4.3).
   [148] Comy to **Bhāra S** (S 22.22), SD 17.14: "Seeking delight here and there" (*tatra,tatrâbhinandinī*) means having the habit of seeking delight in the place of rebirth or among the various objects, such as forms. "**Craving for sense-pleasures**" (*kāma,taṇhā*) means lust for the five cords of sense-pleasures. Lust for form-sphere existence or form-

(1) craving for sensual pleasures,
(2) craving for existence,
(3) craving for non-existence [for extinction].   (S 56.11), SD 1.1

Rewatadhamma, in his translation of the Dhamma,cakka Sutta (S 56.11) says that, "Suffering is gene-rated by the mental tendency toward essentialism" based on "experiencing thoughts, emotions, behavi-ours, or self as discrete and unchanging" (1997:18). Another modern Buddhist scholar, W Hart, puts it this way:

> The real cause of suffering is the reaction of the mind.... The reaction is repeated moment after moment, intensifying with each repetition, and developing into craving or aversion. This is what in his first sermon the Buddha called *taṇhā*, literally "thirst": the mental habit of insatiable long-ing for what is not, which implies an equal and irremediable dissatisfaction with what is.
>
> (Hart 1987:38)[149]

5.2 LIFE AND SUFFERING. ACT, too, regards suffering as an integral part of human existence. It at-tributes the universality of suffering to a specific process: the bidirectionality—or, according to Buddh-ism, the *duality*—of human language. In **the Neyy'attha Nīt'attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5+6), the Buddha declar-es that we should be aware of the 2 styles of his teachings, and not to confound them, that is, an implicit teaching (*neyy'attha dhamma*) and an explicit teaching (*nīt'attha dhamma*).[150] The Commentaries note that the Buddha sees language as expressing the ultimate truth (*param'attha sacca*) or the conventional truth (*sammuti sacca*).[151]

Furthermore, in **the Poṭṭha,pāda Sutta** (D 9), the Buddha declares that he uses language without being attached to them:

> For, Citta, these are merely common names, common expressions, common usages, common de-signations in the world that the Tathāgata [Thus Come] uses without attachment to them.
>
> (D 9,53/1:202), SD 7.14

In **the Mahā Viyūha Sutta** (Sn 904), the Buddha declares that we tend to knock down others' views but accept our own conventional-language view to be the real truth.[152]

While pain is unavoidable as long as we have a physical body and a conscious mind, we often tend to project pain or amplify it, and react negatively to such a constructed pain so that it becomes suffering. This projection and amplification occur through our use of language and conditioning (mental and social). Each human language or culture has its own sets of words for pain and how such pains should be suffer-ed. In other words, what is regarded as painful in one culture, might not be so in another. The Chinese specifically and Singaporeans generally, for example, tend to place a greater emphasis on tangible wealth rather than mental health, which means that not having wealth or not enough of it, as a rule, brings about suffering, at least in the form of mental trauma or stress. Only then, we might be goaded on to seek ex-pensive medical treatment, psychotherapy or meditation therapy.

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less-sphere existence, attachment to dhyana, and lust accompanied by the eternalist view: this is called "**craving for existence**" (*bhava,taṇhā*). Lust accompanied by the annihilationist view is "craving for annihilation [extermina-tion]" (*vibhava,taṇhā*). (SA 2:264). **Bodhi:** "This explanation of the last two kinds of craving seems too me to nar-row. More likely, craving for existence should be understood as the principal desire to continue in existence (whe-ther supported by a view or not), craving for extermination as the desire for a complete end to existence, based on an underlying assumption (not necessarily formulated as a view) that such extermination brings an end to a real 'I'." (S:B 1052 n38)

[149] For details, see Gethin 1998:59-84 (ch 3).

[150] (A 2.3.5+6), SD 2.6b.

[151] DA 2:383; AA 2:118. Sometimes, this ultimate language is called "Dharma language," so it may be a *reference* to the ultimate truth or the ultimate truth *itself*. See **Levels of learning**, SD 40a.4 (2-4).

[152] Sn 4.13.904, SD 26.11 (1.3). See also **Language and discourse,** SD 26.11.

5.3 CONSTRUCTED SUFFERING. Since the verbalization processes occur arbitrarily, any of it can re-mind us of a past hurt, whether truly remembered or from false memory. Indeed, since events can be re-counted verbally in an infinite number of ways, even situations that actually opposed previous pain can evoke suffering. If we stare into the dark abyss of our hearts, the darkness stares back.[153]

For example, if we have experienced a painful death in the family, we may recall that death when we see a hearse. However, we may also recall it on a beautiful sunny day, or when seeing a bright flower, or when watching an innocent child playing spiritedly. Just as in a word-association game, we can retort with "hot" when cued with the statement "cold," even so, too, a joyful event, such as listening to strains of a romantic song or dance music that the dearly departed loved, we may be reminded of the painful loss.

Similar effects can occur during otherwise positive moments: a relaxation exercise may induce anxie-ty, thoughts of suicide are known to rise during holidays, a joyful event may produce depression, or the noticing the absence of anxiety may produce panic.

The bidirectionality of human language may also increase suffering by providing a language for self-knowledge, bringing about experiential avoidance. Take the case of negative emotions. In non-human organisms, a painful stimulus is simply avoided. In humans, a negative verbal reaction itself becomes a target of avoidance.

Human language allows loose sets of bodily sensations, contextual reactions, and behavioural predis-positions to be verbally constructed (*abhisaṅkharoti*) or proliferated (*papañceti*) into "emotional states." We may label one loose set as "depression" and another as "anxiety." The aversion of these verbally con-structed events is, in turn, amplified by verbal evaluation (*vitakketi*) (eg, anxiety is "bad," something that "people who love one another don't have"), and by projecting (*saṅkappeti*) verbal futures connected to the negative emotions (eg, "If I have a panic attack here I would make a complete fool of myself"). These verbal constructions (*vacī,saṅkhārā*) significantly worsen the negativity of the emotional event itself. [4.2.3.3]

5.4 VERBAL EVALUATION. Our sufferings are not only created by human language, but they are worsened by it, especially because of the verbal "value-adding," but these are the wrong kinds of values. This negative "value-adding" is known as "conceit" or mental measuring, *māna*, in Buddhism.[154] We con-stantly compare our current situation to verbally constructed futures, letting verbalization increasingly dominate our conduct (eg, "I can live if only I can be free of this anxiety").

Furthermore, we often verbally construct resulting scenarios that we have never experienced. These processes and scenarios can be painful even when they are literally accurate. For example, we all "know" that we will die, and informed people "know" that the universe will either expand infinitely and burn out, or will collapse into an infinitely dense pea. In either case, we know that our lives and all of our achieve-ments are ultimately imagined, finite and impermanent.

Finally, even though we have been increasingly exposed to pain and suffering, our human language often suggests solutions and strategies that may work fine in the external world, but which are often in-effective, even toxic, when applied to our inner experiences. These particularly include ineffective think-ing and emotional defences or avoidance strategies, any of which increases the frequency of the mental states being avoided. This only makes the situation more aversive, and distracts us from attending to our current natural environment and so decreases our effectiveness in wholesomely dealing with the here and now.

5.5 THE LANGUAGE OF SUFFERING

5.5.1 Buddhist insights. The Buddhist concepts of craving (*taṇhā*) and clinging (*upādāna*) draw their meaning from lay language. The Buddha regards the source of clinging to be multilayered, so that awakening is a kind of peeling of the proverbial onion—our direct experience of true reality gradually

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[153] This saying is based on a quote from Nietzsche: "He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you." (*Beyond Good and Evil,* tr R J Hollindale, London: Penguin, 1973:102). Cf SD 24.10b (2.4.3).

[154] On conceit (*māna*), see **I: The nature of conceit,** SD 19.2a.

peels away the false and constructed surfaces. He discerns various steps and different aspects on the path to inner awakening or nirvana.

According to the Buddha, we are comprised of form, feeling, perception, formations and conscious-ness[155]—all of which are impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self[156] [3.3.2.3]. Self-knowledge and full awakening arise through a direct, calm and clear vision of our body, feelings, mind and phenomena [dharmas]. [157]

Our true creator, the first cause and prime mover, as it were, is <u>ignorance</u>. We caught, as poetized by Joyce, "*in the ignorance that implies impression that knits knowledge that finds the nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that drives desire that adheres to the attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality.*" [158] This is the cycle of existence that holds us in its grips of impermanence, pain and emptiness.

5.5.2 ACT insights. ACT theory and therapy, as a rule, helps us appreciate the Buddha's insights. For example, consider the notion that clinging arises through liking and disliking, which in turn come from feelings.[159] Consider the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta definition of "temporal" suffering as fol-lows: "to be with the unpleasant; to be without the pleasant; not to get what one desires" [4.2.2.1]. From an RFT perspective [2.1], this craving has to do with verbal knowledge of certain events, verbal construc-tions of the past, present, or future, and with "frames of comparison," within which these are compared and evaluated against one another (Hayes et al 2001).

Here's a simple way of describing this whole process: consider the sentence, "I want X." The word "want" comes from the Old Norse word *vanta*, meaning "lacking, absent, wanting" (OED). The simple verbal act of wanting something thus requires: (1) noticing verbally (in the RFT sense) what is present, (2) noticing verbally what is absent, thereby perceiving this event through derived relations, and (3) com-paring the two.

If such verbal deliberations are habitual, we will become "attached" to a verbally constructed future, in which what is absent seems to be present, what is present is unnoticed, or we delude ourself into seeing something other than what is before us. In truth, all along there is only the process of verbal construction. Domination by a verbal future that minimizes contact with the present arises from verbally comparing the verbally constructed and value-added impressions and feelings. ACT, in short, is a very effective way of seeing the Buddha's insights which, in significant ways, define, empower and cultivate what is best in us.

6 Acceptance and mindfulness

6.1 ACCEPTANCE AND CHANGE. According to Hart (on Buddhism), "the first step toward emerging from such suffering is to accept the reality of it, not as a philosophical concept or an article of faith, but as a fact of existence" (1987:38). The second step is that of seeing its arising in craving and clinging. The Buddha defines the ceasing of suffering in the third noble truth as "the utter fading away and ending of that very craving, giving it up, letting it go, being free from it, being detached from it."[160]

This giving-up of craving is not so much a deliberate change in the craving as it is a profound change on another level of mind. This transformation is often gradual because it goes down right to the roots of craving itself. To do this, we first need to "accept" it just as it is (that is, not to deny it): this is what the first noble truth is about, anyway. As Batchelor puts it, "Letting go of a craving is not rejecting it but al-lowing it to be itself" (1997:9). The ACT approach is similar, applying a specific set of psychological processes as the means of transformation.

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[155] These are <u>the 5 aggregates</u> (*pañca-k,khandha*): see 17.

[156] These are <u>the 3 characteristics</u> (*ti,lakkhaṇa*): **Atam,mayatā,** SD 19.13 (1).

[157] These are <u>the 4 focusses of mindfulness</u> (*satipaṭṭhāna*): see SD 23.

[158] James Joyce's poetic version of <u>dependent arising</u>: *Finnegans Wake,* NY: Viking Press, 1967:18. See esp **Dependent arising,** SD 5.16.

[159] For the full formula, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16), SD 6.14.

[160] **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,11), SD 1.1.

6.2 ACT SOLUTIONS

6.2.1 Just as our inner conflict and struggle come from cognitive *fusion* [2.2.1], acceptance is a nat-ural result of cognitive *defusion* [3.3.2]. Cognitive behaviour therapists have decades of research showing that psychopathology tends to be associated with certain kinds of thoughts. Such therapies usually pre-scribe the changing or removing of those thoughts, but the contextual qualities of ACT provide a different solution, as follows.

ACT changes the context in which thoughts tend to reduce effective action. All verbal relations, like all behaviour in contextual systems, are situational. Its impact, too, is contextually situated. The problem with negative or irrational thoughts, from a contextual viewpoint, is not the form of the thought but its ex-cessive literal quality [3.3.2.1].

6.2.2 Changing the literal quality by literal intervention (eg, through cognitive disputation) is difficult because the process itself contradicts the outcome. On the other hand, changing the context in which thoughts are taken literally changes its literal quality, even if the thoughts persist.

Consider the thought, "I must be perfect." In normal cognitive behavioural approaches, this thought would be targeted, disputed, tested, and changed through direct means. There are many contextual alter-natives, all of which are components of ACT.

For example, the thought could be watched non-judgementally, as we watch thoughts while meditat-ing. Or, the thought could be voiced out rapidly for a few hundred times, until only its sound remains. Or, the thought could be given a size, shape, color, speed, form, texture, and so on, just as we would observe external objects.

We could gently smile in the heart or thank the mind for such an interesting thought to watch. We could examine bodily feelings, emotions, memories, and behavioural predispositions that arise from such a thought, and take time to simply experience these events as aspects of an unfolding, changing process of living.

We could label our cognitive processes (eg, "Now I am having the <u>thought</u> that I must be perfect"). We could label and observe the thought very slowly, so that each word takes minutes to be verbalized or subverbalized. In other words, we would use more time to label, "Now...I...am...having...the...<u>thought...</u> that ...I...must...be...perfect..."

6.3 REDUCING LITERALITY

6.3.1 Buddhist techniques

6.3.1.1 THE FOCUSES OF MINDFULNESS. Such techniques help to reduce the literality of the thought. It weakens our tendency to treat a thought as if it is what it refers to. However, we do not change the form of the thought itself. We change only the context that troubles the thoughts.

These methods clearly parallel those of Buddhist practice. In the noble eightfold path, for example, <u>right mindfulness</u> (*sammā,sati*) is defined in **the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 141) as follows:

"Having put away covetousness and displeasure in the world, a monk [a meditator] dwells exertive, fully aware, mindful, *contemplating body in the body...contemplating feeling in the feelings...contemplat-ing mind in the mind...contemplating phenomenon in the phenomena...*"[161] This is the practice of the four focuses of mindfulness.[162]

The phrase "having put away covetousness and displeasure in the world," in simple terms, means that we should let go of any notion of liking or disliking whatever arises at any of the sense-doors (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind—this is our "world"). Technically, this phrase refers to the overcoming of the 5 mental hindrances,[163] which prevent us from really enjoying the profoundly blissful meditative state called dhyana (*jhāna*).[164]

6.3.1.2 WATCHING THE MIND. Even more interesting is **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10) definition of the third focus of mindfulness, the "contemplation of mind" (*cittânupassanā*), which instructs us, espe-

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[161] **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141,30), SD 11.11.
[162] See SD 23.
[163] On <u>the 5 mental hindrances</u> (*pañca nīvaraṇa*), see *Nīvaraṇa*, SD 32.1.
[164] See **Dhyana,** SD 8.4.

cially while meditating, to simply observe if the mind is lustful or lust-free, hating or hate-free, deluded or undeluded, narrowed or distracted, great [exalted] or small, surpassable or unsurpassable, concentrated or unconcentrated, liberated or unliberated.[165]

In simple terms, this passage says that the meditator should observe his meditative progress—as and when needed—whether any distraction or hindrance [5.3.1.1] has arisen or subsided, or whether he has attained to some level of mental concentration or not. These observations before or after the fact, that is, once the meditator attains dhyana (a profound meditative state free from all mental hindrances), he is free from all verbalizing and thinking.[166]

In practice, the Sutta instructs us firstly to note or label our mind just as it is (as mentioned above). In ACT language, this is to "deliteralize" them, that is, not to take them literally (as we have "worded" or projected them) as fixed ideas, but as what they are right *now,* as passing events. That is why these terms are listed in opposing pairs (except for the fourth). [5.4]

6.3.1.3 THE MIND AS IS. This means that we are to note a mental state as it arises and as it passes away, as stated in the famous Sutta refrain:

> So he dwells observing <u>the mind</u> in the mind *internally*,
>   or, observing the mind in the mind *externally*,
>   or, observing the mind in the mind *both internally and externally*.
> Or, he dwells observing states that *arise* in the mind, **[60]**
>   or, he dwells observing states that *pass away* in the mind,
>   or, he dwells observing states that *arise and pass away* in the mind;
> Or else, he maintains the mindfulness that 'There is a mind (*atthi cittan'ti*),' merely for know-
> ing and awareness.
> And he dwells independent, not clinging to anything in this world.
> And that, bhikshus, is how a monk dwells observing the mind in the mind.   (M 10,35), SD 13.3

Here, "internally" refers to our own mind, while "externally" is that of another's mental state (that we are able to perceive). "Both internally and externally" refers to an alternating noting or labelling as the occasion demands. At the start (especially if we are beginners), it is easier to watch or label the "passing away" of the mental state. Then we go on to watch or label its "arising." Then when we are more focused in the practice and process, we go further into the details, as it were, watching both the arising and the passing away of the mental state (which needs more attentiveness).[167]

If we find doing this to be difficult, then we should simply observe the mind simply as "mind," as it is, "merely for knowing and awareness" (without any comment). The idea is not to cling to any view, to free our mind of all other thoughts, until even these noting and labelling, too, are not needed, and the mind is peaceful and blissful.

6.3.1.4 BREATH MEDITATION. Those who have done breath meditation would know that when it is properly done, it reduces the literality of mental events: we stop commenting on our thoughts so that they subside. If a counselee is totally new to meditation, he could be taught a simple breath meditation, that is, a two-stage method (or even single-stage method) where we note each <u>ending</u> of the in-breath and out-breath by counting it ("In...out...1; In...out...2, and so on up to 5),

In the second stage, we stop the counting. We simply watch the in-breath labelling it as "In," and the out-breath as "Out." In either stage, the counting and the labelling help to push away distracting thoughts. As beginners, we are likely to be distracted anyway; so, we patiently and joyfully go back to watching the breath until we are focused and fully calm.

Like any meditation worth its salt, it is not advisable to learn to meditate simply from the instructions here (which serves only as a pointer to proper practice).[168] We are inclined to try anyway (especially

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[165] M 10,34 = SD 13.3 & SD 13.1 (5C) (explanation).
[166] For details on this, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana,** SD 33.1b.
[167] For details, see SD 13.1 (5C).
[168] For <u>Dharmafarer meditation classes</u>, see http://themindingcentre.org.

where we are unable to find an experienced and compassionate teacher), and as long as we are not fanatical about it, we might notice some calmness, and a rule of thumb is to note that whatever experiences we have in such a provisional meditation is "mind-made."[169]

6.3.2 Benefits of ACT. In ACT, the techniques for cognitive defusion [3.3.2] are used to reduce the behavioural impact of thoughts. ACT research, for example, has found that a growing acceptance of previously avoided private events bring about positive behavioural and psychological outcomes.[170]

Similarly, Bach (2000) found that severely mentally ill patients with hallucinations or delusions treated with ACT showed a 48% reduction in rehospitalization over 4 months compared to treatment as usual, and that this outcome was based on a significantly greater reduction in the believability, not the frequency, of psychotic symptoms.

7 Valued action

7.1 DOING AND BEING. Although to most traditional Buddhists, Buddhism is a religion, with its beliefs and rituals, it is, in essence, with neither dogma nor belief (Batchelor, 1997). Even the 4 noble truths are not so much beliefs as orientations to action: understand suffering, abandon craving, aspire to awakening, and cultivate the middle path.[171]

The eightfold path prescribes no religious faith or belief. The very first path-factor is right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*), which ultimately means *no* views.[172] This factor is primary to the path, underlying all the other factors.[173] In other words, the core of Buddhism (especially of early Buddhism) is significantly behavioural and experiential. The bottom line in Buddhism, therefore, is not belief, but doing and being.

7.2 A FULL LIFE. ACT is a behaviour therapy that has the same approach as Buddhism. Acceptance and cognitive defusion are not ends in themselves, but a means to self-actualized living. What requires acceptance and defusion are determined by personal history and purpose. The ACT goal is not to deal with all our feelings, but to unconditionally accept only those that arise in the context of living a valued life.

For example, if raising a family brings us into contact with pain, the task then is to observe that pain and to raise our family. This is entirely compatible with Buddhism. S N Goenka, a modern Buddhist teacher, declares, "This is holy indifference: neither inaction nor reaction, but real, positive action with a balanced mind" (Hart, 1987:54).

7.3 THE TRUE SELF

7.3.1 Three kinds of self

7.3.1.1 Issues concerning the self are another vital overlapping connection between ACT and Buddhism. As we have noted, ACT speaks of 3 kinds of self: the conceptualized self, the process self, and the transcendent self [3.4.2]. ACT seeks to abandon the conceptualized self—an attachment to a literal construction of "who" we are—on the same grounds that it seeks to abandon attachment to any thought, as such attachment is unhelpful and unnecessary. The ACT toward the conceptualized self is characterized by the slogan, "Kill yourself every day."

7.3.1.2 "**Kill yourself every day**" is a metaphorical way of asserting that we must clear our mind of any negative self-view. This ACT idea closely parallels the Buddha's teaching of non-self [7.3.2]. The Buddha, too, uses the word "self" or *attā* in at least 3 ways: the first, the notion of an abiding soul (which is rejected); the second, a reflexive pronoun, a conventional term, acceptable insofar as it facilitates wholesome communication; and thirdly, the self as mind, which is what needs to be cultivated and asserted the quest of self-awakening.

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[169] On the breath meditation, see "The truth is in how we breathe" (R129), in *Revisioning Buddhism* 2011:46-49 (no 15).

[170] Bond & Bunce 2000.

[171] See **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (SD 56.11,9-12) & SD 1.1 (5.1).

[172] See **The notion of *diṭṭhi*,** SD 40a.1 & "Now views free" (R255), 2012.

[173] See **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117), SD 6.10.

When samadhi is attained, the mind is often said to be "exalted" or "become great" (*maha-g,gatā*) [6.3.1.2]. It is made great or "exalted" because all the mental hindrances [6.3.1.1] have been overcome, thus attaining dhyana [6.3.1.1].[174] A poetic or metaphorical way of viewing this is to say that non-self is a "self" without boundaries, one that transcends time and space, as it were. It is not defined by the past, present or future, nor is it troubled wherever it is. It is unconditionally all-embracing.[175] [3.2.2.3]

7.3.2 Non-self (*anattā*) is one of the key concepts in early Buddhism, and its most difficult one. The bases for understanding and accepting this non-view are a clear vision of pervasive impermanence, and calm wisdom of universal suffering. These three universal characteristics mean that we are all subject to change, which can be a painful process if we have no love for learning. What actually makes this natural growing and liberating process painful is our notion of some kind of abiding self, a hard-headed, heartless phantom that conjures up false ambitions and empty promises, deluding and distracting us from evolving along the path to self-awakening.

Buddhist spirituality is essentially that of accepting ourself just as we are and rejecting the self that neither exists nor becomes us. Impermanence means that every passing moment is an opportunity for self-awareness, and that suffering means that self-realization is yet to be attained. Meantime, we need to "Kill the self every moment."[176]

8 Self and consciousness

8.1 ACT AND BEHAVIOUR. ACT sees the self as an on-going learning process, a dynamic awareness of our own flow of experiences. This is a very Buddhistic idea, where "self" (*attā*), used in a positive sense to refer to the mind.[177] This is one of the many helpful, but provisional, words in the great conversation on personal growth and spiritual awakening according to Buddhism.

Cultivating the self-as-process is, directly or indirectly, a goal of various forms of therapy, particularly the humanistic and the experiential. This kind of self supports the on-going verbal or "conscious" contact with events, such as sensing and feeling. This can be helpful in reducing the desire for excessive control of our actions (mental, verbal and bodily). Instead, we should direct it to working positively on the actions' effects. All this is very Buddhistic.

It becomes problematic whenever we conceptualize the self as content, that is, as being discrete and unchanging: "I can't change. I'm like that. This is me." Such verbalizing is rooted in one of the 4 biases: greed, hate, delusion or fear [2.2.4.2]. The self as a process is what we cultivate through mindfulness, which reminds us of an important Buddhist sense of *attā* as the mind (see above here).

The notion of the self as context or transcendent self seems to be unique to ACT. ACT relies on this sense of self as a support for us (the counselee), so that we can safely and fruitfully face our feared private events. The self as context or transcendent self is theorized to result from deictic[178] verbal relations, such as here/now, I/you, or now/then,[179] and may be defined as a perspective-based self-knowing. Such an idea is also found in early Buddhism (the mind present here and now), but ACT applies this in its own way, with its own goals.

8.2 ACT AND CONSCIOUSNESS

8.2.1 Consciousness according to ACT. ACT is a form of cognitive behaviour therapy [1.1.1], so its "cognitive" aspect addresses the consciousnes, and not merely the "behaviour" or external and physical aspects. Unlike Buddhism, ACT tries to see consciousness as functioning "in itself," rather than as being

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[174] See **Catuttha Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.4) @ SD 24.14 (4).

[175] See SD 2.16 (12): Non-self is a "self" without boundaries.

[176] See "Accept yourself, reject your self" (R274), 2013.

[177] See SD 2.16 (3.3): If there is no self, what is there?

[178] Deictic is a tt that expresses distinctions of reference, with respect to person, time or location, that is almost always egocentric, ie, expressing primarily with reference to the speaker.

[179] Barnes & Roche 1997; Hayes 1984.

"conscious of" something.[180] Some experimental support for this conception has recently been shown in very young children: teaching children deictic verbal relations results in a notable increase in perspective-taking—including the ability to take another person's perspective into account.[181] [2.1.2]

    Even for someone who is conscious, consciousness is not a "thing," which must have limits. We can be conscious of the limits of everything except our own consciousness. Self as context, according to ACT, is present everywhere, that is, wherever we have ever been. This means that our own experience of a transcendent sense of self is that it has no limits: it is not a thing. It may be "no thing," but it is certain not "nothing." All this is very familiar to informed Buddhists.

8.2.2 Consciousness according to Buddhism

8.2.2.1 Now we may come to something that is uniquely ACT. As conscious humans, we do not usually know our perspective to change once it emerges (especially in the preschool stage). ACT sees this sense of "self as context" as being significantly therapeutic. This suggests that there is at least one stable, unchanging fact about ourself that is experienced directly and not merely a belief or an idea. In a thera-peutic context, this sense of stability and constancy helps us (the counselee) to safely confront extreme psychological pain and trauma, since we feel deep inside us that no matter what happens, our sense of be-ing is not threatened.

8.2.2.2 In early Buddhism "thought" (*citta*), "mind" (*mano*) and "consciousness" (*viññāṇa*) are some-times synonyms, as in **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61), where the Buddha declares:

> **6** It would be better, bhikshus, for the untutored worldling to take this body, made of the four great elements—rather than *the mind*—as the self.
>
> **7** What is the reason for this?
> Because this body, made of the four great elements, is seen standing for one year, two years, three years, for four, five, or ten years, for twenty, thirty, forty or fifty years, for a hundred years, **[95]** or is seen standing for even longer.[182]
>
> 7.2 PARABLES. But that which is called 'thought' (*citta,*) or 'mind' (*mano*), or 'conscious-ness' (*viññāṇa*), arises as one thing and ceases as another, like night and day.[183]
>
> **8** Just as a monkey, bhikshus, roaming through the forest and mountain-side, takes hold of one branch,[184] letting that go, then grabs another,
> even so, bhikshus, that which is called 'thought,' or 'mind,' or 'consciousness,' arises as one and ceases as another, like night and day.   (S 12.61,6-8), SD 20.2

    Clearly here, Buddhism diverges from ACT in stating that it is better to take the body rather than the mind as the self, that is, if we are inclined towards some notion of self.[185] The reason for this is simple: the body appears to stand longer than the mind, which is a momentary event, so fast that it is difficult to find a simile for it.[186] However, we can say that even here, ACT takes the transendental self as merely a

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[180] In early Buddhism, we can identify at least 5 functions of consciousness, ie, consciousness as impermanent, as "consciousness of," as a factor in cognition, as providing continuity, and as evolving: see *Viññāṇa,* SD 17.8a (2).

[181] Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes & Cullinan 2001 esp 188-191; see also 2001:38 f.

[182] *Dissatâyaṁ bhikkhave cātummahā,bhūtiko kāyaṁ ekam pi vassaṁ tiṭṭhamāno, dve pi vassani tiṭṭhamāno, tīṇi pi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno…* (the text repeats a full sentence for each number, but is here abridged in the scribal tradi-tion). Comy here introduces the post-Buddha theory of moments (*khaṇika,vāda*)—that formations are right there even as the moments arise—and so asks why the Buddha says that the body "stands [endures]." In autoanswer, it says that the body endures just like the light of a lamp burns through the night "by way of a connected continuity" (*paveṇi,sambandha,vasena*), even though the flame ceases right where it burns without crossing over to the next part of the wick. (SA 2:99)

[183] *Rattiyā ca divasassa ca.* See Intro (3).

[184] The monkey simile. See Intro (3).

[185] See SD 26.9 (1.6.2): Is the mind the self?

[186] A 1.5.8/8 = A:B 1.48.

"safe spot" from where we (the counselee) can safely confront our demons. They are all impermanent even if they may seem so permanent to us.

8.2.2.3 Furthermore, it can be said that both ACT and early Buddhism agree in seeing that the self is constructed by culture and language.[187] Our notion of self or soul tends to be conditioned by our family, peers, teachers, religion and community. The language we use, too, tends to give us some ready-made or fixed notions of a self. However, if we accept science, we must agree that whatever exists must exist in time. Therefore, whatever exist must necessarily be impermanent.

9 Conclusion

9.1 BUDDHICIZATION OF PSYCHOLOGY?

9.1.1 Will psychology become religious? Buddhist teachings and practices have proven their human value over 2500 years, but the question for ACT and other members of the cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) family is this: What further value can they gain by considering these practices from the viewpoint of cognitive behavioural psychology? Importing Buddhist practices into cognitive behaviour therapy is fine, but how far is this really helpful? Buddhist ideas and methods are two and a half millennia old, and Buddhism is already well-acculturated and deeply entrenched in many societies and communities in Asia and is now quickly spreading in the west and westernized societies (especially Australia).

Buddhism today has its various traditions of faith, rituals, practices, and communities that support positive mindfulness and wholesome actions. Without including all such traditions can psychotherapy use Buddhist ideas and methods to their fullest benefits? If psychotherapy does include them, would it then become a religion, too?

These are questions whose answers we cannot yet know. However, since the mid-20th century, western psychology has benefited tremendously from Buddhism. So significant is this gain that psychology now has been given a radical boost as a family of mind sciences.[188] It is meaningful to say that this is a post-Freudian and post-Skinnerian era for the mind sciences, which in an important way is picking up from where the true pioneers of modern psychology, such as William James (1842-1910) and Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), left off.[189]

9.1.2 Buddhist benefits for psychology. A real step forward in empirical clinical practice could come, however, by considering these concepts and practices in scientific terms. This might lead to something new. Scientific psychology is still an adolescent. From a science viewpoint, we still do not know what is to be really gained (or lost) in the end by approaching an ancient wisdom. Moreover, Buddhism isn't any ancient religion: it has a well-tested and efficacious theoretical corpus of mind teachings, problem-solving methods, meditation system and case-histories that are rooted in ethical training, something of immeasurable value to modern psychology.

In each area examined, there are clear parallels between ACT and Buddhism. These parallels suggest that there can be a common core of understanding human nature and suffering in the light of religion and science. They also suggest that issues of acceptance, cognitive fusion and defusion, self, and valued action may be worth exploring as one way that behaviour counselors might consider Buddhist concepts and practices from the point of view of modern behavioural psychology.

9.2 PSYCHOLOGIZATION OF BUDDHISM?

9.2.1 Future psychology. "Psychology is an academic discipline and therapeutic practice that emerged in the cracks made by religion as it disintegrated in the West. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, everything from mystical experience, to the belief in an afterlife, to sexual neurosis, to possession by spirits was unceremoniously stripped from religion and taken over by the psychologists; to the extent that Sigmund Freud was able to comment, 'Religion is an illusion and it derives its strength from the fact that it falls in with our instinctual desires.'" So Sujato begins his paper on "How Buddhist traditions are transforming—and being transformed—through their relation with Western psychology" (2011).

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[187] See **Self & selves,** SD 26.9 (4.1): The self is language-constructed.
[188] See **Meditation and consciousness,** SD 17.8c (1-5).
[189] See Kelly et al 2007 & reviews by Kennedy 2006 & by Moreira-Almeida & Koenig 2008.

The psychology tide rises and sweeps on unrelentingly: nowadays, we even hear of "Christian medi-tation" amongst the Catholics and "Christian mindfulness" amongst the Protestants. Unfailingly, they will, in some way, allude to breath meditation and lovingkindness cultivation in their own adaptation of Buddhist meditation methods. Meditation has indeed become all things to all people.

The roots of such urgency and assimilation go back over a century. When the Sinhala anagarika (lay renunciant) **Dharmapala** (1864-1933),[190] in 1903, attended one of William James's lectures at Harvard, James was quoted as having said to him, "Take my chair. You are better equipped to lecture on psycho-logy than I."[191] In 1904, after one of Dharmapala's meditation lectures there, on the topic of non-self, James declared, "This is the psychology everybody will be studying twenty-five years from now."[192] But, as we shall see, he was too optimistic.[193]

9.2.2 A better choice

9.2.2.1 Contemporary Buddhism and modern psychology have been mutually influencing each other since the late 19th century (when modern psychology first arose). This meeting and melding of two great systems resulted in the mainstreaming and secularizing of meditation: it is now taught by a growing num-ber of non-Buddhists, including other religionists, and practised by a growing cross-section of the urban community throughout the world.

Modern psychotherapies, such as ACT, adapting some of the best theories and practices that Buddh-ism has to offer, are in turn offering efficacious personal healing. We do not need to turn to the shamans and alternative healing, since the new psychology gives us truer and more workable explanations of pain and its relief. Would Buddhism become outmoded and obsolete, then? Not if Buddhism can carefully present its teachings and methods of self-healing as an efficacious and meaningful choice for those who may not be able to pay for the high cost of therapy, and indeed even be more efficacious than secular therapy, at least in some areas.

9.2.2.2 What about the new and scientific explanation of life and the world? Would the new science and psychology provide us with evidence-based teachings, and displace religion, including Buddhism? Indeed, throughout history since the Renaissance, we have seen the arrogance, imagination and power of religion being tamed and contained, so that today any informed religious leader or teacher would see the advantage and necessity of presenting their faith with humility, truth and love.

Will key and defining Buddhist teachings such as karma and rebirth be outmoded? This remains to be seen. However, since they are not dogmas, but schemata for a better understanding of the meaning and purpose of life and death, we do not have to accept them at once as tenets of faith. Rather we, as Buddh-ists, are free to *provisionally* accept them (or even reject them, provisionally), until such time when we better understand them.

As already noted [5.2], the Buddha advises us to diligently note whether his teachings (which also applies to post-Buddha texts) are "stating the truth," whose meaning has been drawn out (*nīt'attha*), or are "pointing to the truth," whose meaning needs to be teased out (*neyy'attha*). A rule of thumb is that teach-ings that are unhelpful in our better understanding or practising of meditation should be set aside (perhaps provisionally). Those teachings that conduce to mind-training should be carefully studied, taught and pro-pagated.

We need not bowdlerize our scriptures nor ban post-Buddha literature. However, for the sake of our own social progress and spiritual health, we must see things for what they really are. We need to see the non-humans that populate the Buddha stories for what they are; we should accept the later teachings for what they are and nothing more, that is, not to canonize them into "Buddha word." We have no right to do that (since we are not awakened), except to work on our own minds to be able to see beyond words and views, into the true reality of things.

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[190] Dharmapala attended the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, 1893: see SD 17.8c (10.3).

[191] Ananda Guruge (ed), *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of Anagarika Dharmapala*. Sri Lanka: Ministry of Education af Cultural Affairs, 1965:681.

[192] David Scott 2000: 335.

[193] See **Meditation and consciousness,** SD 17.8c (2.7).

9.2.3 Mutual benefits

9.2.3.1 BEYOND REDUCTIVE MATERIALISM. Advances in psychology in recent times may bring radical changes to the way we view religion, and grow as the roots for the future displacement of religion with "mind science." This would be a quantum leap from the kind of Buddhism currently defined and propagated by the affluent and technocrats.[194] Buddhism as mind science[195] can be a serious Buddhist's way of consistent sutta-based learning and Dharma-moved practice of the second of the 3 Buddhist trainings [3.6.1.2].

The rise of modern psychology, as such, is not a danger to Buddhism. On the contrary, "it will be the wellsprings of the continued vitality of the Buddhist traditions, as they reflect and examine themselves in the light of new and emerging understandings" (Sujato, 2001). Both Buddhism and psychology have much and mutual gain from their cross-fertilization, as noted by Sujato:

> Psychology and Buddhism have much to offer each other, when they are willing to listen and understand with humility. Psychology offers a detailed understanding of psychological development and the formation and nature of mental illness that is far more detailed than anything found in Buddhism. And Buddhism offers contemplative techniques that have been repeatedly proven to be uniquely effective, not only in relieving symptoms of mental illness, but in expanding consciousness to heights unsuspected by Freud.   (Sujato, 2011)

9.2.3.2 BEYOND REDUCTIVE MATERIALISM. The Buddhism that is accepted in psychology is, of course, not the totality of the teachings and methods of the Buddha, the greatest sage of the mind who ever lived. The reason for this is clear: psychology is a *science*, while Buddhism is *spirituality*. While science looks outside at things and measures them, spirituality teaches us to look within and see ourself and others immeasurably. Will the two paths of human quest meet as a common universal discipline? Very likely as parapsychology—clear signs are already here.[196]

For the moment, the psychologists can only pick and choose from the Buddha's cornucopia of calm and wisdom, leaving aside what they cannot digest (for the moment). A promising sign is that as Buddhism becomes westernized and globalized, we hear less or none of man-eating ogres[197] and merit-transfer[198] but more of self-transforming psychotherapy. This is what will uplift both Buddhism and psychology from their prevailing reductive materialism.[199] In short, the new psychology will be a wellspring of the vital growth for the various Buddhist traditions as they reflect and renew themselves in the light of new and emerging wisdom.

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[194] We may view our times—the 21st century—as the age of the vidyadhara or "knowledge professionals": on the various populist Buddhist ideals through the ages, see SD 17.8c (10.1).

[195] The "science" here refers to a self-knowing orientation by the avoiding of *narcissism*, *superstition* and *self-doubt*, which are gross yet pernicious manifestations of the 3 fetters of self-identity, attachment to ritual and vows, and doubt [3.3.2.2].

[196] See esp Kelly et al, *Irreducible Mind,* 2007.

[197] Besides humans, Buddhist cosmology and mythology often refer to non-humans such as devas, nagas, asuras, yakshas, gandharvas, apsaras and kimnaras. Many of these closely parallel beings in Greek myth, such as gods, serpents, titans, cyclops, minstrels, dryads and harpies respectively. See SD 36.13 (4.5): Doṇa's 4 classes of existence? & Thī 374 f nn = SD 20.7.

[198] On the "merit-transfer" controversy, see SD 2.6a (3).

[199] "Reductive" here means the tendency to over-simplify a problem, subject or idea, esp in a crude or vague way. While modern psychology tends to psychological merely as the process of the brain, modern Buddhists tend to define Buddhism in terms of worldly success, professional abilities, or social status, and see happiness as tangible self-achievement here and now. See eg criticism of "materialistic" meditation in David Desteno, "The morality of meditation," http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/07/opinion/sunday/the-morality-of-meditation.html?smid=go-share. A bowdlerized version appeared in The Straits Times (Saturday 20 July 2013: D19).

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